

WHAT DO EXECUTIVE COACHES PERCEIVE AS THE MAJOR INTERNAL AND
EXTERNAL FACTORS DERAILING LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

WHAT DO EXECUTIVE COACHES PERCEIVE AS THE MAJOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS DERAILING LEADERS

Olurotimi J.D Akindele

Larry Moneta

Leader derailment, characterized by the stagnation, demotion, or termination of leaders' careers, is an increasingly alarming triangular issue. This phenomenon not only disrupts individual career trajectories but also poses significant challenges for organizational stability and effectiveness. Various factors, both internal and external to the leader, can trigger leader derailment, a complex problem that causes a career crisis. This qualitative study, recognizing the invaluable insights of certified and trained executive coaches, sought their expertise to understand why many leaders derail rather than succeed.

Although scholars have studied the monographs on leader derailment, they have yet to delve into executive coaches' perspectives to understand their perceptions of the internal and external factors contributing to derailment. This research covered that gap and was both exploratory and confirmatory. It was confirmatory because it validated existing research on leader derailment, whereas it was exploratory because it probed and uncovered new theoretical territory and provided novel insights. The primary research question that guided this study was: What do executive coaches perceive as the major internal and external factors derailing leaders? The analysis of this study's data revealed specific recurring reasons, such as: (a) inadequate emotional intelligence; (b) dysfunctional personality; (c) poor polarity management; and (d) organizational landmines. Consequently, this study's results did not contradict existing research,

but rather added to it by showing that leader derailment is a multilayered problem, with the following findings: (a) emotional intelligence enables better leadership qualities and significantly determines how a leader is perceived; (b) an undiscovered and unregulated personality in a leader can be problematic; (c) it is crucial for leaders to recognize and manage polarities; (d) an organization can become a pitfall for a leader; and (e) office politics is unavoidable and beware of workplace abuse and bullies. However, this research discovered an anomaly—a notable deviation from these findings. Despite the major factors and patterns identified as prone to derailing leaders, some leaders remain immune to them. This study probed into the intricacies and found that a leader's unique brilliance, such as charisma, superior technical ability, innovative-visionary prowess, and a strong team and network, can often lead people to discount and overlook their shortcomings, thereby attributing the leader with high idiosyncrasy credits. This study concludes that several factors, each with its own unique influence, contribute to the complexity and perplexity of leader derailment.

Keywords: leader derailment, executive coaches, internal factors, external factors, idiosyncrasy credits, dark side, shadow self, polarity management, centripetal leadership, trait theory of personality, organizational behavior theory (OBT), situational leadership theory (SLT), and theory of emotional intelligence (EI).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to research, more leaders tend to fail than succeed, and leader derailment has been found to be a significant determinant contributing to that statistic (Furnham, 2010; Mackie, 2008). When leaders find their efforts limited, disrupted, and eroded by external and internal factors, they are said to experience *derailment*, an unexpected stalling or plateauing in their careers (Burke, 2006). Studies have indicated that derailment occurs when leaders are unaware of or fail to address derailing factors (Kaiser et al., 2013). It is one of the major reasons many leaders do not realize their full career potential in their organizations (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Wan, 2011).

Context and Problem Statement

Research has shown that a significant percentage of leaders' experience derailment. Studies have revealed that a percentage, ranging from 50%-75% of individuals in leadership roles will experience derailment in their career journey (Bentz, 1985; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Hogan et al., 2010; Leslie, 2022; Van Velsor et al., 1993). For example, according to the Harvard Business Review, 40%-70% of new CEOs fail within their first 18 months (Carucci, 2016; Charan, 2005; Ciampa, 2016; Frangos, 2018; Harrell, 2016). Similarly, Forbes reports that the Corporate Executive Board (CEB) estimates a failure rate of 50%-70% among executives within the first 18 months (Ettore, 2020). Overall, the executive failure rates are alarmingly high, reaching up to 75% (Williams, 2021b). This high turnover rate suggests significant challenges in maintaining long-term leadership stability and effectiveness.

The data above are a stark reminder that more leaders tend to experience derailment than success, making successful leaders the exception. However, it is important to understand that derailment is not a permanent state. It is often a transient phase that leaders can and do recover

from (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2007; Webb, 2006). Equally noteworthy is the fact that derailment is often a gradual process, not a singular event. It typically starts with small, seemingly innocuous behaviors and outcomes that, if left unchecked, can steadily escalate into more pronounced, counterproductive, and detrimental issues (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). This highlights the cruciality of early detection and intervention in preventing or mitigating the effects of leader derailment (Padilla et al., 2007; Paleczek et al., 2018).

Furthermore, leader derailment is more than just a personal issue; it has far-reaching implications for both leaders and their organizations. Research has shown that derailment negatively impacts leaders personally and the organizations they serve, particularly in the areas of finance, employee satisfaction, morale, and well-being (DeRue et al., 2011; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Simonet et al., 2018). Overall, this research suggests that derailment has personal and organizational consequences. To that end, this study has identified factors from various studies that contribute to leader derailment. Notable derailment factors include a leader's counterproductive personality (Carson et al., 2012; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), poor emotional intelligence skills (Baker et al., 2018; Gentry et al., 2015; McCleskey, 2013), overreliance on certain strengths (Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; McCartney & Campbell, 2006), failure to deliver results and difficulty in building and leading a team (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996), and unhelpful organizational dynamics (Balthazard et al., 2006; Conger & Nadler, 2004; Ross, 2020). Consequently, these factors highlighted above tend to trigger derailment outcomes for leaders. In CHAPTER 2, these factors highlighted will be explored and examined, as well as other derailers that are discovered in this study. Therefore, this study stresses the importance of further research, analysis, and evaluation to address the problem of leadership derailment.

Purpose of Study

This study is proactive, aiming to raise awareness to help leaders and organizations avoid and overcome the problem of leader derailment. It does so by identifying and understanding various derailment factors, as well as providing insights from executive coaches on how to combat derailment risks. By gathering insights from executive coaches, this study offers practical recommendations for leaders and organizations to address and mitigate the risk of derailment proactively. Additionally, this study seeks to explore the impact of these derailing factors on leaders and organizations, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in leader derailment and empowering leaders and organizations with this knowledge.

Why Am I Interested in Leader Derailment?

I am particularly interested in leadership derailment due to its concerning implications. My goal is not just to avoid it but to actively help other leaders avoid and overcome it. It is imperative to do so because effective and successful leadership benefits organizations, communities, and societies. Such leadership brings inspiration and hope. Conversely, failed and derailed leadership can have far-reaching negative consequences (Kaiser et al., 2008).

My interest in this topic began as a teenager, when I first witnessed a leadership derailment in my church with our charismatic pastor. The derailment manifested in the form of gossip, dysfunction, and ultimately, his dismissal. Years later, I witnessed two more derailments, this time involving the vice president of student affairs at my community college and the talented president of our student government. Confusion, conflicts, and a failure to meet expectations marked these instances. Furthermore, the shortcomings of public officials have left me puzzled and perplexed, igniting my curiosity about the root causes of leadership failures. I have observed that despite possessing great personal and professional attributes, many leaders have derailed or

are derailing. This has profoundly impacted me. These experiences have led me to understand that charisma, raw talent, extraordinary promise, and outstanding potential are insufficient for ensuring leadership success, longevity, and effectiveness. As a result, I strive to help myself and other leaders fulfill their potential by avoiding derailment. Thus, by contributing to the field of leader derailment studies, this research empowers leaders to become aware of derailing patterns and risks. It provides a comprehensive understanding of derailment factors and the urgent need for preventive measures, potentially saving organizations significant time and resources while protecting individual leaders from painful psychological and career setbacks.

Positionality

As a dedicated federal government employee, committed public servant, and leader on various federal, school, and nonprofit boards, I have realized that leadership is quintessential. This belief was not formed in a vacuum but through a personal journey shaped by experiences. I have witnessed the detrimental effects of failed leadership, which has only strengthened my conviction and advocacy for the importance of effective leadership. I view corporations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations as able contributors to society's well-being, and thus, developing leaders who embody strong values, integrity, competency, and credibility is not just important but essential. I believe in a future where institutions and corporations work together and serve as excellent pillars of distinction, setting high standards that resonate and inspire society to greater heights.

My firm belief is that leadership is essential because it possesses the potential to wield a profound and positive influence on the lives of individuals and societies. The impact of effective and influential leadership is not just undeniable; it is transformative. It has the power to ignite inspiration and drive, propelling individuals to accomplish remarkable feats. This potential for

leadership to inspire and guide is a core part of my unwavering dedication to embodying and nurturing commendable leadership qualities, all while fostering leadership excellence through my research pursuits. My commitment to leadership extends to my interest in the topic of leader derailment, a gateway to comprehending the intricate factors contributing to leadership failure or ineffectiveness. This knowledge can prove instrumental in preempting derailment and subsequently helping leaders focus and get back on track.

The ethos of dependability and accountability forms the foundation of effective leadership. Reliable and responsible leaders foster an environment that instills in people a sense of trustworthiness and assurance that their leader consistently prioritizes the greater good of the organization, community, or nation over their selfish desires. This assurance can foster unity, elevate productivity, fuel innovation, and cultivate psychological safety. Hence, corporations, government agencies, and nonprofit leaders wield the potential to serve as exemplars of virtue, honor, and credibility. To get to that level, leaders must be mindful, acknowledge derailment risks, and proactively avert them. The cumulative impact of such prudent, virtuous leadership is not just rhetoric; it can cause a tangible difference in the lives of citizens, employees, communities, and even customers. This unyielding belief underscores my commitment to fostering leadership that empowers, propels, and sustains growth and prosperity. It is this belief that gives me hope and optimism for the future.

Justification and Conceptual Frames: How Am I Approaching This Research?

This paper contends that research on derailment is lacking in some areas. As a result, it approaches this study with the perspective that further research is necessary. Therefore, this paper seeks the wisdom and unique perspectives of executive coaches to better understand derailment factors. This is because their depth of insight, experiences, and ability to provide

personalized, actionable intervention plans have been instrumental in helping leaders enhance their competencies and capabilities (Kilburg, 2004; Joo et al., 2012; Stern, 2004). Bartlett et al. (2014) assert that numerous executive coaching research articles recognize and stress the importance of evaluating the coachee's readiness to accept change. This information is notable because it highlights the fundamental principle of human agency and its role in embracing or rejecting change and development. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge that coaching or intervention plans are ineffective for leaders who are unwilling to change. This research is mindful of this critical factor and incorporates it into its considerations.

Furthermore, it is vital to note that research on leader derailment has continued to gain increasing attention in recent years as organizations have recognized the importance of identifying and preventing derailment in their leaders (Kaiser et al., 2013; Inyang, 2013). This paper highlights that several theoretical frameworks can explain the multifaceted conceptual background of leader derailment. These frames include the trait theory of personality, emotional intelligence theory, organizational behavior theory, and situational leadership theory. In CHAPTER 2, this research will delve deeper into these theories and demonstrate their relationship to leader derailment.

CHAPTER 1 Summary

Leader derailment is a persistent and complex issue that results in a career crisis where stagnation, demotion, or termination are evident due to internal or external factors. As research has shown, derailment can happen when a leader has dysfunctional personality traits (Bentz, 1985; De Haan, 2016; Carson et al., 2012), poor emotional intelligence skills (Bryson, 2005; Ruderman et al., 2003), counterproductive organizational factors (Conger, 1990; Conger & Nadler, 2004; Mackie, 2008), failure to deliver results and difficulty in building and leading a

team (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996), and a failure to change and adapt (DeVries & Kaiser, 2003; Kaiser & Overfield, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to note that although research has shown that leader derailment is a complex and multifaceted problem, studies have also shown that executive coaches can provide interventions against it (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Mackie, 2016).

Executive coaching has empirically proven to be an effective solution for leadership problems and ineffectiveness when leaders demonstrate openness and willingness to address their leadership shortcomings (De Haan et al., 2019; De Meuse et al., 2009). This research, which focuses on executive coaches' perspectives, aims to address the universal issue of leader derailment and provide solutions to counter and mitigate it. This study also highlights that the derailment issue is not exclusive to any particular industry or organization, rendering it pertinent and advantageous for leaders and organizations across various sectors. The goal of this study is to raise awareness about leader derailment and equip leaders with the tools to combat it. The research question that guided this study is provided below.

Research Question

The following research question was explored iteratively: What do executive coaches perceive as the major internal and external factors derailing leaders?

Working Definition of Key Terms

Throughout this dissertation, several key terms are listed below for the readers' reference and review. These terms are associated with this study's research question and its conceptual and theoretical framework. Thus, these terms are provided early here to facilitate and establish a clear understanding of their definitions. By providing these definitions, readers are able to grasp the context in which these terms are used and their significance within the study.

Leaders: leaders are individuals who occupy formal positions of authority within an organization and are entrusted with the responsibility of guiding, influencing, and directing the actions, decisions, and behaviors of employees to achieve an organization's goals, vision, and mission.

Leader Derailment: refers to the phenomenon whereby leaders experience a triad of either stagnation, demotion, or termination. These are unexpected career setbacks that occur due to internal or external factors that disrupt a leader's effectiveness and career trajectory.

Executive Coaches: are experienced professionals who work with individuals in leadership positions to enhance their skills, performance, and personal development.

Internal Factors: refer to personal, inherent or intrinsic elements within an individual that influence their behaviors, decisions, and outcomes. These include attitudes, beliefs, and personality.

External Factors: are outer influences or circumstances that affect individuals. These can include subordinates, colleagues, supervisors, organizational culture and structures, economic conditions, market forces, incentives, mergers and acquisitions, and forced changes.

Idiosyncrasy Credits: are a theoretical construct within the field of social psychology and organizational behavior, referring to the interpersonal currency a person accumulates through conforming to group norms and expectations over time. Individuals accrue a kind of social capital or credit by consistently adhering to group norms, contributing to group goals, and maintaining harmonious relationships within the group.

Polarity Management: is a leadership and problem-solving approach that recognizes and leverages the interdependent and opposing forces (polarities) that exist in complex situations.

Rather than trying to eliminate these opposing forces, polarity management aims to balance them in a way that maximizes their positive aspects while minimizing their downsides.

Centripetal Leadership: an approach that integrates diverse and peripheral ideas, styles, and values into a cohesive whole. This approach encourages accurate holistic assessments, refined leadership techniques, and continuous balancing by managing polarities and avoiding extremes, thereby embodying the principle of the golden mean.

Dark Side: in the context of psychology and leadership, it refers to the negative or destructive aspects of an individual's personality that can undermine their effectiveness and ethical behavior (e.g., being callous, selfish, domineering, oppositional, and exploitative). These traits often include narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and other dysfunctional behaviors that can lead to unethical decision-making, poor interpersonal relationships, and detrimental impacts on organizations or groups.

The Shadow Self: a concept introduced by Carl Jung, represents the unconscious and subconscious part of the personality that contains repressed weaknesses, desires, and instincts. It encompasses the traits and behaviors that an individual denies or is unaware of, often because they are deemed unacceptable or negative by societal standards.

Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB): refers to voluntary actions or behaviors by an organizational member that have the potential to harm the organization or its members. These behaviors are detrimental to the overall productivity, effectiveness, and functioning of the workplace. CWB can manifest in various forms, ranging from mild, less severe actions to more serious and destructive activities. Such behaviors often violate organizational norms, policies, and ethical standards.

Trait Theory of Personality: individuals possess enduring characteristics, known as traits, that influence their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions across various situations over time. It focuses on identifying, describing, and measuring specific attributes that are believed to constitute an individual's features and proclivities, providing a framework for understanding differences between people and their predispositions to certain behaviors or reactions.

Organizational Behavior Theory (OBT): examines how individuals and groups within an organization interact, behave, and influence each other and how the organization's overall culture and structure impacts performance and effectiveness. OBT seeks to analyze and explain factors that impact individual behavior, group dynamics, communication, decision-making, motivation, leadership preference, and organizational dynamics. At its core, OBT aims to provide insights into how individuals and groups within an organization function and influence one another.

Situational Leadership Theory (SLT): posits that there is no single "best" leadership style; instead, effective leadership involves adapting and tailoring one's leadership approach to the specific situation and the developmental stage of subordinates or followers.

Theory of Emotional Intelligence (EI): proposes that an individual's ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively plays a critical role in personal and social success. EI encompasses a set of skills that involve recognizing and regulating one's emotions, as well as understanding, managing, and influencing the emotions of others in social interactions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the importance and impact of leadership on people and organizations, this review states that leader derailment is a multifaceted problem that requires further examination. First, this section defines leader derailment and its consequences. Then, it uses four theoretical frames, trait theory of personality, organizational behavior theory, situational leadership theory, and theory of emotional intelligence, to show that leader derailment is a multifaceted problem for leaders and organizations. It then examines specific derailment factors and categorizes them into internal and external components. Thus, this review argues that leader derailment has major internal and external factors that lead to undermined, eroded, and ineffective leadership. Furthermore, this review presents credible academic and practical strategies to combat derailment, emphasizing their practicality and effectiveness. It asserts that the executive coach's perspective is essential for a deeper understanding and resolution of derailment issues, given their sought-after interventions and hands-on experiences with leaders.

What is Leader Derailment

Scholars and theorists have conceptualized leadership derailment as representing the dark side of leadership (Burke, 2006; Conger, 1990; Furnham, 2010; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Zhang & Chandrasekar, 2011). Literature portrays the dark side of leadership as the socially undesirable, toxic, and destructive aspects of leadership that lead to adverse personal and organizational outcomes (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; Mackey et al., 2021; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper et al., 2007). As a result, several studies view the dark side of leadership in correlation with leader derailment (Inyang, 2013; Padilla et al., 2007; Ross, 2020; Webster, 2016). In the vernacular of everyday language, leader derailment can be compared to the often-overlooked underbelly causing problems.

Research defines leader derailment as the unanticipated and undesirable deviations in the career journey of a leader, which is induced by either the internal factors of a leader's behavior or personality, external factors related to organizational and situational dynamics, or a mix of both (Mackie, 2008; McCormack et al., 2017). Leader derailment is often characterized by a period of success in a leader's career followed by an unexpected failure that stalls, sidetracks, or demotes the leader (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). Derailment also reflects a skills mismatch between leaders and their organization's present and changing needs (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Lombardo and McCauley (1988) further describe derailment as reaching a premature plateau in a leadership position due to a personal flaw or leadership incompetence. Leader derailment has also been characterized as a career crisis (Strietzel, 2020a). Furthermore, it has been observed that leader derailment happens when leaders leverage their best attributes to move up the organizational ladder while failing to grow more broadly and thus are unable to provide expected results when faced with situations that require a greater variety of skills and competencies (Kovach, 1986; Leslie, 2022). In essence, derailment can be defined as attaining a leadership position with outstanding potential and promise, only to subsequently and unexpectedly suffer prolonged stagnation, demotion, or termination due to an internal factor, external factor, or a combination of both.

Thus, various factors can cause derailment. For example, internal factors such as a dysfunctional behavior, an unpleasant or overbearing personality, a lack of development, an inability to adapt, and failure to meet organizational expectations and build a team are some examples that can cause derailment, according to research (Carson et al., 2012; Hogan et al., 2010; Kaiser et al., 2013; Kovach, 1986). Externally, a toxic or counterproductive organizational culture and unfavorable situational dynamics (i.e., workplace bullying, mergers and acquisitions,

and market forces) could also trigger outcomes that cause leaders to fail to realize their full career potential (Mackie, 2008; McCall, 1998).

Moreover, one noteworthy point about derailed leaders is that they had a previous record of success and were at one point believed to be capable of meeting future expectations, only to fail later (Zhang et al., 2012). Therefore, their prior success made it difficult to anticipate or predict the unexpected derailment they later suffered (Ross, 2020). Because of the complexity, unpredictability, and multifaceted nature of leader derailment, it is important to further examine and break down the issue through four conceptual frameworks.

Four Conceptual Frames for Understanding Leader Derailment

This review section notes that the conceptual background of derailment research can be explained and explored from several theoretical frameworks, including trait theory of personality, organizational behavior theory, situational leadership theory, and the theory of emotional intelligence. A breakdown of each theory is presented below along with its connection to derailment factors.

Trait Theory of Personality and Leader Derailment

The trait personality theory is a framework that posits that individuals have personality traits that are relatively enduring and predict behavior across different situations (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Roberts et al., 2005). This theory suggests that personality is made up of an observable set of underlying traits that are recognizable and relatively stable over time (Allport, 1937; Jayawickreme et al., 2019).

The conceptual background of derailment studies and trait theory can be traced to Bentz (1967, 1985), who pioneered a seminal 30-year leader derailment longitudinal study among

leaders in the United States during the 1970s. Despite the indisputable brilliance of some of the leaders he studied, Bentz discovered that many of them nonetheless derailed. He argued and showed that different reasons might cause leaders to derail but concluded that often, an overriding personality defect led to the derailment and failure of the leaders he observed (Hogan & Hogan, 2007; 2009; Kaiser et al., 2013; Lombardo et al., 1988). The implications of this are significant. When trait personality theory is applied to derailment, it suggests that certain personality traits and characteristics may predispose individuals to counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and subsequently derailment (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; LeBreton et al., 2018). More broadly, one's traits can increase the likelihood of succeeding or derailing or behaving in a way that is counterproductive or harmful to others and to one's career trajectory (Judge et al., 2002; 2009).

Furthermore, to fully grasp the influence that personality traits can have on causing derailment, it is critical to focus on exploring negative personality traits and expound on them. Thus, this review will underscore the underlying mechanisms and consequences of personality traits, as well as their influence on leadership and the workplace (Spain et al., 2013). It has been reported that leaders with high narcissism (excessive self-focus) may be influential in circumstances that demand confidence and self-belief (Furnham et al., 2012; Spain, 2019). However, this grandiosity and uber individualism can later become problematic when it becomes incessant, as others may perceive them as selfish, egotistic, uncaring, and dismissive of others' ideas and contributions. Consequently, such a perception in the eyes of others significantly increases a leader's risk of derailment (Hogan & Hogan, 2001), a risk that should not be taken lightly. Therefore, this notion underscores the importance of identifying and addressing negative personality traits before they become severely problematic. As a result, it resulted in the creation

of the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) (Hogan & Hogan, 1997), a tool for workplace personality evaluation. This tool is instrumental in identifying and decoding potential counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) that are influenced by dark personality features (Harms, 2017; Spain, 2014). Note that CWBs are behaviors and characteristics that are detrimental to the success of an organization, and dark personality features represent traits that are considered socially maladaptive, destructive, toxic, and interpersonally problematic (Spain et al., 2013; Spain, 2019; Zeigler-Hill & Marcus, 2016).

According to Hogan et al. (2010), the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) was designed to detect and measure 11 personality traits associated with leader-derailment behaviors. These 11 traits provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how seemingly small cracks in a leader's personality can expand into significant fissures when left unchecked and managed, leading to excessive trait utilization and derailment. These 11 traits encompass (a) excitability: characterized by a tendency to be oversensitive, melodramatic, neurotic, and easily upset or volatile. Leaders high in excitability may create a workplace atmosphere akin to walking on eggshells, where team members are constantly wary of triggering an emotional outburst. (b) Skepticism: the inclination to distrust others and continually question their motives. Such leaders perceive their surroundings with suspicion, akin to perceiving phantoms, thereby cultivating a culture of paranoia, rumors, and mistrust within their team. (c) Cautiousness: an inclination to exercise extreme caution and steer clear of potential risks. Leaders with high cautiousness are like ship captains who always stay in the harbor, paralyzed by the fear of stormy seas, thus missing opportunities for innovation, growth, and transformation. (d) Reserved: This refers to a tendency to remain uncommunicative and keep one's thoughts and feelings to themselves. These leaders can be compared to a locked diary, where vital information and insights are inaccessible,

leading to miscommunication and disengagement within the team. (e) **Leisurely**: This refers to a tendency to adopt a laid-back demeanor and refrain from taking necessary and appropriate initiative. Leisurely leaders often resemble a river that meanders lazily through a valley, lacking the drive to tackle challenges head-on, which can lead to stagnation and complacency. (f) **Bold**: A disposition for being overconfident, imprudent, and taking risks without considering the potential consequences of the benefits and negatives. Such leaders are like gamblers at a casino, placing bets on risky ventures without thoroughly weighing the stakes, which can result in significant organizational losses and damage their reputations. (g) **Mischievous**: This refers to a tendency to be excessively playful and take pleasure in breaking rules or social norms. Mischievous leaders can be seen as tricksters whose actions, while sometimes charming, often undermine authority and disrupt norms and team harmony. (h) **Colorful**: The propensity to seek attention and behave in flamboyant or attention-grabbing ways. These leaders are akin to peacocks, flaunting their feathers to stand out, which can distract from the team's collective goals and thus create unnecessary competition for the spotlight. (i) **Imaginative**: This refers to the inclination to be creative and immerse oneself in fantasy. Excessively imaginative leaders can be like dreamers lost in their own world. They often propose grandiose ideas that are too idealistic and disconnected from practical realities, leading to nonviable and unfeasible projects. (j) **Diligent**: This refers to the inclination to strive for perfection and exert excessive effort. Inordinately diligent leaders are like taskmasters who never rest, driving themselves and their teams relentlessly, which can result in burnout and lower team morale. (k) **Dutiful**: This refers to a tendency to be excessively compliant, placing a higher priority on adhering to rules and procedures than achieving results. Unreasonably dutiful leaders resemble bureaucrats so focused

on following the rulebook that they miss the forest for the trees, often hindering flexibility, variation, and novelty (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; 2009).

Understanding these traits highlighted above helps in identifying potential derailment risks in leaders. By acknowledging and addressing these tendencies, organizations can implement strategies to mitigate their impact, thereby fostering more effective leadership and healthier team dynamics (Kaiser et al., 2013; Kaiser et al., 2008; Hogan, 2007). Moreover, it is crucial to understand that these 11 traits are considered potential derailers because they can interfere with a leader's ability to work effectively with others as well as limit their ability to manage their behavior in a way that is healthy, emotionally intelligent, and consistent with organizational goals, values, and priorities (Harms et al., 2011; Treglown et al., 2016). However, it is equally important to note that these traits are not necessarily harmful in all situations and may actually be strengths in specific contexts (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). For example, a leader who basks in imaginative fantasies and boldness may be more likely to be creative at critical times and less likely to suffer from low confidence during frantic times that demands risky decision-making. This understanding enhances the comprehension of how personality traits can positively and negatively aid a leader.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon leaders and organizations to be fully aware of these facts and take proactive steps in managing them. It is crucial to do that in order to prevent useful personality traits from evolving into counterproductive behaviors that lead to derailment (Hogan et al., 2009; Rima, 2000). In addition, when traits are not appropriately managed, they can turn into a 'dark side,' leading to various problematic behaviors and attitudes. These include selfishness, abuse, aloofness, domineering behavior, oppositional attitudes, exploitation, and an inability to build and maintain effective relationships (Furnham, 2016; Spain et al., 2013;

Tepper, 2000). This is why research has consistently shown that unmanaged and untamed negative traits (dark side) can lead to derailment (Furnham, 2010; Kaiser et al., 2013).

Furthermore, it is vital to understand that the dark side of personality refers to a constellation of negative or abnormal qualities or characteristics associated with toxic behavior in leaders. It embodies destructive leader behavior and a lack of empathy (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Moshagen et al., 2018). Among these constellated negative traits are narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, which are collectively known as the dark triad (DT) (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissism is characterized by excessive self-focus, entitlement, and a lack of care or concern for others. Machiavellianism is identified by manipulateness, devious strategic thinking, and a lack of concern and respect for ethical considerations. Psychopathy is marked by impulsivity, a lack of remorse or guilt, and a disregard for social norms in order to derive pleasure from controlling and suffering others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Wu & LeBreton, 2011). Moreover, dark triad traits are not mutually exclusive, and some derailed leaders may exhibit multiple negative traits from the dark triad, such as elevating themselves egotistically, hurt others, take pride in the suffering of others, and protect themselves by deflecting or redirecting their mistakes and weaknesses towards others (Furnham, 2010; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Judge et al., 2009; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Moreover, dark triad traits, also known as the dark side of personality, are often thought to be in opposition to the bright side of personality, which encompasses positive traits such as openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (sometimes named by its polar opposite, neuroticism), are considered crucial for leadership success (Zaccaro et al., 2004). To elaborate, according to Zaccaro et al (2004), despite emphasizing that a combination of multiple traits, rather than a single characteristic, influences effective leadership, they also highlighted the

tendency of successful leaders to exhibit certain personality features. Specifically, they found that personality traits like extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and intellectual openness are critical components of effective and successful leadership (Zaccaro et al., 2004). It is worth noting that these traits are part of the five-factor personality model (FFM), also known as the Big Five (McCrae & John, 1992), a model that plays a significant role in understanding personality.

These personality traits are critical for leaders because research has shown that they can significantly and positively impact a person's behavior, interpersonal relationships, and overall approach to life and work (John et al., 2008). Emotional stability entails impulse control, mood regulation, and resilience to emotional stress (Corr & Matthews, 2020). Conscientiousness characterizes the degree to which a person is organized, self-disciplined, dutiful, and goal-oriented (John et al., 2008). Extraversion is characterized by a pronounced tendency towards sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm (John & Srivastava, 1999). Individuals who are high in extraversion are often outgoing, talkative, and energetic, and they enjoy engaging with the external environment and social interactions (McCrae & Allik, 2002). Moreover, agreeableness describes a person's polite, amiable, considerate, and collaborative disposition (Boyle et al., 2008). Openness describes a propensity for thinking through issues, looking for novel experiences, being interested in new ideas, possessing curiosity, and having a tendency to reflect on one's feelings or actions (Goethals et al., 2004). Therefore, it is arguable that having a low degree of openness, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability can lead to derailing behaviors. As a result, research indicates that individuals with such traits are more susceptible to career problems and failure due to their personality rigidity, poor interpersonal relationship skills, and a lack of growth mindset that curiosity and openness foster

for leadership emergence and effectiveness (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Fleenor, 2023; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011; Paleczek et al., 2018; Soto & Jackson, 2020). However, this review notes that research has also shown particularly that agreeableness is not a significant predictor of leadership success or effectiveness. For instance, Judge et al. (2002) in their comprehensive meta-analysis of personality and leadership found that agreeableness had a weak and inconsistent relationship with leadership effectiveness compared to other personality traits. Additionally, further analysis indicated that while agreeableness may predict certain positive behaviors in leader development programs, it does not significantly correlate with overall leadership performance or emergence (Blair et al., 2018).

Furthermore, studies have shown that leaders who fail to manage their dark side traits exhibit poor self-regulation and tend not to learn from their experiences (Furnham & Taylor, 2004; Gentry et al., 2015; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). This is why Hogan et al. (2010) have stated that while many factors contribute to leader derailment, derailment nonetheless remains applicable and generalizable across gender, sex, culture, and organizations because, often, the most influential derailing factor can always be traced back to a personality problem, specifically a failure to manage oneself to expected standards. As a result, leaders who are unable to manage themselves appropriately exhibit their dark side and struggle with experiencing positive emotions, maintaining healthy relationships, and achieving organizational goals (Ashforth, 2013; Furnham, 2018; Higgs, 2009; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Hogan et al., 2009; Kurtulmuş, 2019).

Research has sought ways to identify strategies for preventing and mitigating the effects of dark personality traits. This includes creating interventions, particularly through coaching, to help individuals manage these traits. Coaching is said to not only mitigate the negative effects

but also foster the development of more leadership competencies, such as empathetic behavior, self-awareness, self-regulation, and team-building skills (Gallos, 2006; Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Gentry et al., 2015; Kets de Vries et al., 2015). Although the dark side has been significantly linked to derailed leadership, it is important to note that the trait theory of personality is just one perspective on this phenomenon, and research has shown that other factors, such as external variables like environmental and organizational factors, also play a role in determining whether a leader derails or not (Mackie, 2008; McCall, 1998).

Organizational Behavior Theory and Leader Derailment

Organizational behavior theory (OBT) is a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that spans various theoretical frameworks. It delves into the behavior of individuals and groups within organizational settings, drawing insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and management. This integration allows OBT to explore how organizational structures, cultures, and social norms shape behavior (Jones, 2013). In essence, OBT is a tool that uncovers how norms, structures, and organizational culture influence the behavior of individuals and groups (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Norms in an organization are like the invisible rules of a game, guiding behavior by setting expectations for how individuals should act in various situations. These norms wield significant influence, often dictating what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable within the organizational context (Feldman, 1984). Organizational structures, on the other hand, are the backbone of a business, providing support and shape to its activities. They define hierarchies, roles, and responsibilities, facilitating coordination and control (Jones, 2013). Lastly, organizational culture is the personality of an organization, encompassing shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that

shape its social and psychological environment (Schein, 2010). Just as an individual's personality influences their behavior, organizational culture molds the behavior of employees, influencing their interactions and attitudes towards their work and conduct (Miner, 2015; Robbins et al., 2017).

Because the phenomenon of leader derailment is complex and multifaceted, the organizational behavior theory can be used to examine the role a leader's environment plays in triggering behaviors that lead to derailment. For instance, the behaviorist framework could examine derailing behaviors triggered by one's environment. This means that it can be explained through the lens of stimulus and response. For example, a stimulus triggers a response. According to Skinner (1954), it is crucial to consider the environmental variables that lead to a particular behavior. Skinner posits that behavior is not just the outcome of stimulus alone; that outcome can be dependent and contingent on environmental factors. This theory suggests that stimulus affects behavior, and environmental variables also impact response (Skinner, 1954). Accordingly, within leader derailment, the organizational behaviorist frame shows that an organization or institution can either drive leaders towards ethical and principled leadership or, in contrast, subtly stimulate and cultivate unethical, illegal, or dysfunctional behaviors (Dou et al., 2018).

Furthermore, to underscore and support the importance of the previous points made, Umphress et al. (2010) conducted a study on the concept of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) and its influencing factors. UPB, as they defined it, refers to unethical actions carried out by employees with the intention of benefiting the organization, such as deceiving customers or manipulating financial reports. Their research revealed that a strong sense of organizational identification and positive reciprocity beliefs play a crucial role in increasing the

likelihood of UPB. This means that individuals who strongly identify with their organization and believe in reciprocating their organizations goodwill toward them are more likely to engage in UPB (Dou et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). While this behavior is initially intended to benefit the organization, it can lead to significant ethical and legal issues, particularly for leaders, potentially triggering counterproductive workplace behaviors that contribute to derailment.

Furthermore, research has also shown that leaders operating in a highly competitive or stressful work environment are more prone to certain behaviors, such as impulsivity or a lack of empathy. Similarly, leaders in a culture that values aggressive or results-oriented behaviors are more likely to resort to bullying or unethical behavior to meet expectations (Balthazard et al., 2006; Vardi et al., 2003). Consequently, the research reveals that dysfunctional work environments or poor external organizational dynamics can trigger demotivating and derailing leader behavior and outcomes (Mackie, 2008; McCormack et al., 2017; Padilla et al., 2007).

In addition, this review presents two other organizational frameworks for understanding leader derailment from an organizational behavior perspective. (a) person-organization fit theory (P-O fit); and (b) social network theory (SNT). Integrating these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how organizational factors influence leader derailment. The P-O fit is applied here to break down the implication of a values and culture mismatch between leaders and organizations. At the same time, the SNT is applied to examine how organizational networks shape human action and outcomes.

Person-organization fit theory posits that it is crucial for there to be an alignment between an individual's values, beliefs, and behavior and their organization's culture, values, norms, and structures (Chatman, 1989, 1991). One of the theoretical underpinnings discovered in research is how specific work values, behaviors, structures, and organizational policies affect workplace

behavior and performance. According to Kristof- Brown et al. (2023), the importance of the concept of P-O fit hinges on the harmony between an employee's values and interests and the needs and values of their workplace. Bretz and Judge (1994) explain that organizational structures have been found to play a pivotal role in shaping this alignment. However, when dissonance exists between an individual's values and those championed by their organization, the resulting discord can lead to a profound sense of identity conflict and dissatisfaction with the organization and job. Bardi and Schwartz (2003) shed light on this predicament, highlighting the discomfort and confusion that arises from such misalignments. As such, person-organization fit extends beyond mere job satisfaction to include a sense of belonging, where individuals perceive their values and identity as being acknowledged and supported by their organizational environment (Kristof, 1996). Therefore, this theoretical implication informs knowledge that leaders grappling with identity conflicts with their organization or struggles because of being a poor fit are more susceptible to having diminished job satisfaction and performance because there is a misalignment between them and their organizations (Kristof- Brown et al., 2023; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Analogously, this misalignment can be compared to a mismatched transplant in a garden where the plant's requirements are at odds with the soil's characteristics, leading to stunted growth or decline. When applied to the problem of leader derailment, such misalignment can cause poor leader behaviors and derailment.

The Social Network Theory (SNT), another key component of this review, provides a comprehensive understanding of how organizations, teams, and individuals' function. It is based on the interconnected web of interpersonal relationships within a social system and examines how these relationships and interactions shape and influence human action and behavior through constraint or enablement (Fuhse, 2015). These social systems and networks have been found to

affect the power and identity dynamics within environments and the way interpersonal relations impact belonging, success, and knowledge (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). SNT is analogous to an ecosystem where each species' survival is dependent not only on the environmental conditions but also on its interactions within the food chain. This research highlights that the SNT provides a plausible theoretical framework for why leaders derail within specific social systems due to factors outside their control. Instead, it is due to the external dynamics of the environment or organization that they find themselves in. An example would be the role that power games or office politics plays in determining the success or failure of a leader.

Overall, the theoretical frameworks within OBT offer a promising lens through which the intricate interactions between leaders' behaviors and their organizational environments can be comprehended. This approach not only illuminates the pathways leading to leader derailment but also underscores potential interventions, such as fostering a supportive and ethical organizational culture, that can effectively mitigate such risks (Furnham, 2010; Furnham, 2016). In addition to the organizational behavior theory, this review notes that the situational leadership theory (SLT) can be used to examine why many leaders' derail.

Situational Leadership Theory and Leader Derailment

The leadership framework of situational leadership theory provides a lens to understand how different leadership styles and a leader's ability to adapt impact their proneness to succeed or fail (Goodson et al., 1989; Wright, 2017). Situational Leadership Theory, developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1960), posits that effective leadership depends on the specific situation and the maturity level or readiness of the followers. The theory suggests that leaders must adapt their style to fit the situation's needs and the people they are trying to influence. In

this theory, adaptability is paramount. Therefore, the most effective leadership style is dependent on the situation requiring its need (Hersey et al., 1979). As a result, leaders who cannot adapt their leadership style to different situations or lack the flexibility to respond to changing needs and circumstances may become ineffective and fail (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). The SLT framework also underscores the importance of having versatility, a diverse skill set that allows leaders to switch between different styles, and managing polarities (Blanchard et al., 1993; Kenneth et al., 1976). For example, a leader may use a teaching or directing style when working with new employees but may need to switch to a supporting or delegating style as the employees become more experienced and competent (Cairns et al., 1998; Carew et al., 2008).

In the context of leader derailment, leaders who can adapt their leadership style to different situations are generally more effective and avoid derailment than those who are inflexible and unable to adapt to meet the changing needs of their role and organization (Kovach, 1989; Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). This is because adapting one's leadership style is particularly critical. After all, leaders unable or unwilling to adapt to their organizations' changing needs and circumstances become stuck, underdeveloped, and lose their effectiveness (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009; Kovach, 1986). As a result, rigidity, inflexibility, and a lack of strategic adjustment can lead to a breakdown in credibility and effectiveness and ultimately contribute to leader derailment. Moreover, leaders who can adapt and evolve their leadership style to different situations are better equipped to handle the changes and challenges of leadership (Goleman, 2000). For example, a leader who can balance their need for control with the need to empower their team members may be more effective than a leader who cannot delegate tasks and often micromanages their team (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009).

Furthermore, according to research by Goleman (2000) and his team, there are six leadership styles (coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching), and his study has shown that successful and effective leaders utilize various leadership styles to achieve optimal performance, especially leaders who use four or more leadership styles, notably: authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching. These styles represent different approaches leaders can adopt based on the situation. (a) Coercive Leadership Style: The coercive leader is authoritative and directive, expecting immediate compliance from team members. This style is best suited for emergencies or when quick decisions are necessary. However, it can be detrimental if used excessively, as it can stifle creativity and motivation. (b) Authoritative Leadership Style: This style involves setting a clear vision and direction for the team while giving employees the autonomy to achieve the established goals. The authoritative leader is visionary, motivating, and focuses on long-term objectives. This style is effective when a new direction is needed or during times of uncertainty. (c) Affiliative Leadership Style: The affiliative leader strongly emphasizes building positive relationships and fostering a sense of belonging within the team. This style promotes harmony and cooperation and is helpful for team building and improving morale. (d) Democratic Leadership Style: In this participative style, leaders involve team members in decision-making processes and value their input. The democratic leader seeks to gather diverse perspectives and promote a sense of ownership among employees. This style is effective when creativity and collaboration are crucial. (e) Pacesetting Leadership Style: Pacesetting leaders set high-performance standards for themselves and their team members. They lead by example and expect others to meet their standards. This style can effectively maintain high performance but may lead to burnout if not balanced with other styles. (f) Coaching Leadership Style: The coaching leader focuses on the professional development of

individual team members. This style involves providing constructive questions, feedback, guidance, and opportunities for skill enhancement. The coaching leader aims to help employees reach their full potential and is effective for long-term growth (Goleman, 2000).

Thus, Goleman's six leadership styles provide a framework that highlights the importance of leaders having adaptable leadership approaches based on the context and needs of the situation (Pearson-Shaver & Layton, 2021). Accordingly, a skilled leader should be able to draw on multiple leadership styles and continuously expand their skills repertoire through learning and development to navigate various changing and challenging events (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). However, failure to do so can be problematic and, thus, has been linked to derailment (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009).

Overall, the situational leadership theory (SLT) emphasizes the need for leaders to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to leadership. The absence of these qualities can lead to derailed leadership (Kovach, 1989; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). By understanding this factor, leaders can aim to continuously develop themselves and thus become more effective with an array of newer or different competencies that help adapt their leadership to different situations (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Moreover, the situational leadership theory is not the conclusive frame explaining leader derailment; the emotional intelligence theory will also be applied to understand why many leaders' derail.

Theory of Emotional Intelligence and Leader Derailment

The theory of emotional intelligence (EI) is another theoretical frame this review highlights to explain why leaders derail. The theory of emotional intelligence posits that an individual's capacity to perceive, comprehend, manage, and utilize emotions—both one's own

and those of others—plays a pivotal role in personal and interpersonal effectiveness, particularly in leadership contexts (Antonakis et al., 2009; Chen & Guo, 2018; Goleman, 1995; 1998).

Emotional intelligence encompasses five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2007). According to Goleman and Boyatzis (2017), self-awareness is the conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires. It involves recognizing one's emotions and how they affect thoughts and behavior. This attribute is fundamental for effective leadership as it allows leaders to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how their actions impact others. Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage and control one's emotions, impulses, and behaviors in various situations. It involves being able to stay calm and composed under pressure, delay gratification, and maintain self-discipline. Leaders with strong self-regulation can make thoughtful decisions and maintain their integrity. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It involves recognizing and being sensitive to others' emotions and perspectives. Empathetic leaders can build strong relationships, manage conflict effectively, and create a supportive work environment. Motivation in the context of emotional intelligence refers to a leader's intrinsic drive to achieve goals, maintain a high level of energy and persistence, and strive for continuous improvement. Motivated leaders are passionate about their work, set high standards for themselves and others, and inspire their teams to achieve exceptional results. Social skills are the competencies required to manage and influence other people's emotions effectively. They include communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and teamwork abilities. Leaders with strong social skills can build rapport, foster collaboration, and lead teams effectively (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017).

When developed or present in a leader, these emotional intelligence competencies enable leaders to navigate complex social interactions better, handle stress, adapt to diverse environments, and make informed decisions that foster positive outcomes (Dijk & Freedman, 2007). Scholars have successfully studied EI's effect on leadership and acknowledged it as a critical determinant for leader effectiveness and success (Goleman et al., 2009). Researchers have also found that leaders with high emotional intelligence particularly demonstrate empathy and powerful interpersonal communication, which fosters better relationships with team members, peers, and stakeholders (Bove, 2019). As a result, they demonstrate empathetic listening, making team members feel valued, understood, and supported (Kaoun, 2019). Consequently, this fosters trust, cooperation, and cohesion within their teams (Goleman, 1998). Furthermore, emotionally intelligent leaders excel in conflict resolution and problem-solving, as their heightened self-awareness enables them to manage their own emotions and responses, leading to more constructive outcomes (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Their ability to regulate their emotions also promotes adaptability in dynamic and challenging situations, enabling them to maintain composure for rational decision making (Bar-On, 2004).

Consequently, leaders with poor emotional intelligence can cause problems for themselves and their organizations. Several vital factors can highlight how poor emotional intelligence can lead to leadership derailment. For example: (a) Interpersonal Conflicts and Communication Breakdowns: Leaders with poor EI struggle to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as those of others. This can result in misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and conflicts within teams and across organizational hierarchies (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Such conflicts erode collaboration, disrupt teamwork, and hinder effective communication, which could eventually lead to the leader's loss of credibility and influence. (b) Inability to

Adapt and Manage Stress: Leaders lacking emotional intelligence find it challenging to adapt to changing circumstances and manage stress. They may react impulsively under pressure, exhibit emotional volatility, and struggle to make rational decisions (Goleman, 1995; 2017). This behavior can lead to poor judgment, compromised decision-making, and failure to navigate complex situations. (c) Lack of Empathy: Poor EI is often associated with a lack of empathy and sensitivity towards the needs and emotions of others. This can cause disengagement, low morale, and employee dissatisfaction (Bove, 2019; Boyatzis et al., 2015; Côté & Miners, 2006). As a result, the employees might experience a sense of undervaluation and lack of support, which could hinder the leader's ability to inspire them and earn their trust. (d) Ineffective Conflict Resolution: Leaders with poor EI may respond to conflicts with aggression, avoidance, or dismissiveness. Their inability to manage conflicts constructively can contribute to a toxic work environment and thus undermine team dynamics (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017). Such a hostile atmosphere can stifle creativity and collaboration. (e) Limited self-awareness: Poor self-awareness can inhibit leaders from recognizing their weaknesses and areas for improvement (Bryson, 2005; Carden et al., 2021). This lack of self-insight could prevent them from seeking help because they are unaware of their weaknesses, thereby exacerbating their leadership limitations and difficulties.

In conclusion, poor emotional intelligence is a predictor of leader derailment and thus underscores the significance of developing emotional competencies in leadership (Bryson, 2005; Gentry et al., 2007; Gentry et al., 2015). This is because numerous academic studies have substantiated that leaders deficient in emotional intelligence struggle to manage relationships, adapt to challenges, and make sound decisions, leading to interpersonal conflicts, low team morale, and poor performance (Goleman et al., 2009). As a result, the academic literature

underscores the detrimental impact of poor emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness and the importance of cultivating emotional competencies to prevent leadership shortcomings and failures (Kaoun, 2019; Panait, 2017; Ruderman et al., 2003).

Examining Factors Leading to Derailment

The previous sections provided a comprehensive overview of the conceptual background of leader derailment through four theoretical frames. In the following, this review will meticulously explore and elaborate on specific derailers, that is, distinct factors that restrict and disrupt leadership effectiveness and success. As this research has highlighted, leader derailment is a significant issue; for some leaders, it's a single factor that derails them, while for others, it is a combination of factors that lead to their derailment outcome. These factors encompass personality deficiencies, poor interpersonal skills, challenging situations, and counterproductive organizational dynamics (Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Hogan et al., 2009; Inyang, 2013; McCall & Lombardo, 1983; McCormack et al., 2017). This review will present the major derailment factors it has identified in research and then categorize them into internal and external factors.

Derailers at Large

This area highlights the critical and frequently cited factors that cause leader derailment. These can be narrowed down to the dark side of personality, poor emotional intelligence and difficulty with building and leading a team, paradox of overplayed strengths, inability to develop, adapt to, and learn from mistakes, workplace bullying and poor organizational culture, counterproductive situational and organizational dynamics, and the absence of feedback and workplace silence (Bentz, 1967, 1985; Furnham & Taylor, 2004; Gentry et al., 2015; Higgs, 2009; Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009; Leslie, 2022; Lombardo et al., 1988;

McCall & Lombardo, 1983; McCall, 1998; Morrison et al., 1987). In the next section, the internal and external factors derailing leaders are underscored and explained.

Major Internal Factors Contributing to Leader Derailment

This review has identified four major internal derailing factors (i.e., factors that are internal to an individual) that lead to derailment. The internal factors presented and explored in this review are the dark side of personality, poor emotional intelligence and difficulty with building and leading a team, paradox of overplayed strengths, and the inability to develop, adapt to, and learn from mistakes. These factors are examined because they reveal the behavioral and personality tendencies and flaws that scholars and practitioners have often identified with derailed leadership (Baker et al., 2018; Bryson, 2004; Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Kaiser et al., 2013; Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989).

Dark Side of Personality

As previously stated, in Benz's (1967, 1985) seminal work on leader derailment, he asserted that frequently an overriding personality defect (e.g., being egoistic, volatile, paranoid, overbearing, conflictive, vindictive, argumentative, and manipulative) was the most critical factor that led to the derailment of leaders (Lombardo et al., 1988; Kaiser et al., 2013; Gentry & Chappelow, 2009). After his research, subsequent researchers began to look into what Benz alluded to as an overriding personality defect, and they began to refer to it as the dark side of personality (Benson & Campbell, 2007; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Judge et al., 2009; Wu & LeBreton, 2011). Notably, the dark side of personality has negative influences on human relationships. According to Czarna and Zajac (2018), "dark personality traits refer to a set of traits that are socially maladaptive, aversive, undesirable, and malevolent, but not enough

so to be considered clinical-level pathology” (para. 2). That is, although the dark side of personality is often problematic and disadvantageous, they nevertheless do not match the diagnostic criteria for personality disorders (Furnham, 2017; Furnham et al., 2012; Hogan et al., 2009). The dark side characteristics include a willingness to ignore ethical standards and moral values, taking advantage of others, being manipulative, selfish, deceptive, exuding negative attitudes, and displaying insensitivity to the needs and feelings of others (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; De Haan & Kasozi, 2014; Hogan, 2007; Jonason et al. 2015; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Research further substantiates that the dark side of personality negatively influences a leader's judgment, behavior, and career trajectory (Judge et al., 2009; Kaiser et al., 2013; Simonet et al., 2018). According to Hogan et al. (2010): “every study of managerial failure reviewed [here] points to ‘overriding personality defects’ as a key issue” (p. 13). This is because the dark side traits disrupt establishing and growing interpersonal relationships needed to build, maintain, and guide a team to productivity and success (O’Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014). Also, Hogan and Hogan (2001) have stated these negative personality qualities in leaders often coexist with favorable and prosocial abilities that can mask their destructive elements. Thus, making them not easily discernible, until their negative effects surface in the form of dysfunctional work behaviors that lead to derailment (Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Kaiser et al., 2013).

Furthermore, research has shown that dark side traits are common, but leaders are more susceptible to exhibiting these traits due to the pressures and stress of leadership (Dotlich & Cairo, 2007; De Haan, 2016). Although the dark side traits are not mental disorders, their impact and outcomes are nonetheless devastating and come with consequences due to their counterproductive effect on workplace performance and relationships (Carson et al., 2012;

O'Boyle et al., 2012; Wu & LeBreton, 2011). Consequently, by concealing or failing to address their dark side, leaders risk derailment. Moreover, there are other derailment factors to underline, such as a poor emotional intelligence and difficulty with building and leading a team.

Poor Emotional Intelligence and Difficulty with Building and Leading a Team

Researchers have also found that difficulties with managing interpersonal relationships are the most common personal factor leading to derailment (Chappelow & Leslie, 2001; Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). This is because interpersonal skills are critical for successful leadership. They equip leaders with people skills enabling socializing, coalescing, and connecting with others amicably for collaborative purposes. According to Kaiser et al. (2013), without people-oriented skills, a leader will fail and derail due to an inability to connect and interact with others, regardless of any superior technical talent (Jandro, 2011).

According to researchers, emotional intelligence is managing oneself and interpersonal relationships effectively and successfully (Chen & Guo, 2018; Côté & Miners, 2006). Emotional intelligence entails monitoring and understanding one's emotions, understanding others' perceptions (i.e., why someone might feel excluded or sad), and utilizing emotional information effectively and meaningfully (Mayer et al., 2004). Emotional intelligence includes situational awareness and understanding, which refers to the ability to perceive cues from within and around one's environment and thus make the necessary adjustments to guide and self-regulate one's thinking and behavior for the benefit of oneself and others (Coleman, 2008; O'Connor et al., 2019). As a result, a failure to forge and maintain meaningful and functional relationships is indicative of low emotional intelligence (Eichinger et al., 2009; Ruderman et al., 2003). Goleman et al. (2009) also state that emotional intelligence is a multiplicity of skills in a leader's repertoire

that can produce beneficial individual and organizational outcomes. This is because emotionally intelligent leaders have effective and diverse leadership styles and competencies. They are more effective than their peers who lack them and are often rated highly in their annual performance reviews due to the positive impact of their emotional intelligence during business operations and interactions (Goleman, 2000).

Furthermore, lacking emotional intelligence has been linked to counterproductive organizational and derailing behavior (McNally & Perry, 2002; Rasch et al., 2008). Such as exhibiting angry outbursts, treating others poorly, being uncooperative, overbearing, and failing to handle stress appropriately (Burke, 2006; Hogan et al., 2009; Leslie & Velsor, 1996). Thus, leaders lacking emotional intelligence tend to have poor reactions, are unempathetic, cannot connect with others due to poor people skills, and a lack of conflict management abilities, which have all been linked to derailment (Bryson, 2004; Gentry et al., 2015; Gentry & Shanock, 2008; Ruderman et al., 2003).

The subsequent derailment pointer is team building and leading. According to research, one of the primary factors contributing to leader derailment is when a leader has difficulty with building and leading a team (Leslie, 2022; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). This review reveals that this aspect of derailment affects a leader's ability to meet organizational expectations and encompasses several critical issues, including (a) poor interpersonal skills, (b) inability to develop and motivate subordinates, and (c) failure to foster a collaborative and productive team environment. Thus, the difficulty of building and leading a team can be understood through these various dimensions. Firstly, poor interpersonal skills: Effective team leadership requires a leader to have interpersonal skills (Kaiser & Hogan, 2011); however, leaders who struggle to build relationships with team members may lack communication skills and be perceived as

unapproachable or indifferent. Consequently, this could undermine team cohesion and morale needed to meet or attain organizational goals because the leader lacks the required team dynamics. Secondly, the inability to develop and motivate subordinates: Successful leaders invest in the growth and development of their team members. However, leaders who fail in this area often do not provide adequate coaching, feedback, or development opportunities for their teams, leading to confusion, disengagement, and high turnover rates (Gentry et al., 2016). Third, failure to foster a collaborative and productive team environment: A key responsibility of any leader is to create an environment where team members feel valued and empowered to contribute. Moreover, leaders who cannot foster collaboration may struggle with team conflict, poor communication, and a lack of shared vision, which can impede team performance (Hogan et al., 2010), leading to failure to meet expectations and produce results. It is critical to note that these difficulties highlighted above also correlate with a leader's deficiencies in emotional intelligence, particularly in the areas of poor communication, lack of trust-building capabilities, team empowerment, and inadequate conflict-resolution strategies. Consequently, these dynamics affect a leader's ability to build and lead a team.

In summary, emotional intelligence is conceptualized and presented as the ability to evaluate one's emotions and improve interactions with others; the capacity to recognize, understand and manage emotions effectively for interpersonal and intrapersonal purposes in an adaptive and empathetic manner. This implies that when leaders lack emotional intelligence, they will exhibit counterproductive behaviors that affect others and themselves, leading to interpersonal relationship issues and a lack of self-management in the form of poor self-regulation. Equally relevant is the need for leaders to have the ability to build and lead a team. This is important to note because when leaders successfully build and lead teams, it helps them

to meet organizational expectations and produce anticipated results. Moreover, there are other derailment factors to highlight and explore, such as the paradox of overplayed strengths.

Paradox of Overplayed Strengths

Decades of studies on derailment have revealed that leaders can also derail when their strengths are overused to the point of it becoming a weakness and limitation (Baker et al., 2018; McCall, 2009; Zhang & Chandrasekar, 2011). This paradoxical situation is when a leader is overly dependent on a strength to the point that it becomes a counterproductive factor due to misuse in the wrong context (Ames & Flynn, 2007; Gentry & Chappelow, 2009). McCall and Lombardo (1983) call this when “strengths become weaknesses” (p. 11). Kaplan and Kaiser (2009) refer to this paradox as strengths overused.

Because overused strengths cause a leader to operate with a narrow focus on a particular skill, it prevents the leader from seeing the importance of using or developing other needed competencies, which inadvertently limits the leader (White, 2009). Furthermore, McCall (1998) conceptualizes the problem of overplayed strengths as the inappropriate use of desirable attributes. For instance, when leaders focus solely on maximizing their current strengths without regard for moderation, it leads to excessive behavior. Subsequently, this leads to overdrive or overreliance on a particular behavior to the extent of counterproductivity (De Haan, 2016). Therefore, such overreliance can lead to failure to develop and evolve newer skills. For example, Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) state that examples of overplayed strengths are individual brilliance and initiative; both can initially help propel a leader to the forefront of leadership and organizational prominence. However, over time the same leadership characteristic that propelled leaders to the forefront can become a liability if and when the leader fails to acquire other

attributes required for more extensive and higher organizational responsibilities. An example would be having the capability to foster a collaborative approach to develop solutions and strategies with colleagues and subordinates. This is because the elevation to a leadership post requires a leader to have a people-oriented approach rather than a solo technical approach.

In addition, another effect of overplayed strengths is misapplying a skill out of context (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011). For example, a charismatic leader may think that persuasion may be the solution to addressing any problem when the problem at hand may require active listening and empathy. Thus, overplayed strengths not only breed limitations but could also cause the underutilization of other skills. Consequently, overplayed strengths limit the performance and growth of leaders and organizations (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; Leslie & Taylor, 2005).

Furthermore, another outcome of overplayed strengths is *lopsided leadership*, a one-dimensional leadership style lacking a balanced approach because it inadvertently neglects the use of multiple competencies and alternate skills and strategies (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006). Essentially, lopsided leadership causes leaders to undercut themselves and their organizations by placing too much attention and energy on one particular skill, tactic, or strategy. For example, a leader may undercut collaboration and input within the organization by being too coercive. Alternatively, when a leader always encourages consensus building for all decision-making, the organization is likely to suffer from slow or delayed decision-making. Consequently, lopsided leadership could pose problems for leaders and organizations. This is why Kaplan and Kaiser (2009) have said that leadership “lopsidedness can limit your personal cachet and career prospects” (para, 6-8). That is lopsided leadership comes with consequences and can be detrimental to a leader's career prospects and advancement.

In addition, Kaiser and Overfield (2011) state that overused strengths exist but are hard for leaders to recognize due to the current popularity and emphasis on strengths-based training and programs. Consequently, because of a strong focus on developing strengths, leaders fail to identify the problem of overplayed strengths since they frequently strive to build strengths (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009). Accordingly, leaders must not only identify their strengths and limitations but should strive to see if they are over-relying on particular strengths to the point of counterproductivity. Nonetheless, apart from the downside of over-using or over-relying on one's strength as a leader, studies have also shown that there are additional derailers such as difficulty with developing, adapting to, and learning from mistakes.

Difficulty with Developing, Adapting to, and Learning from Mistakes

Studies have shown that difficulty with developing, adapting to, and failing to learn from mistakes can lead to derailment (Centre for Leadership Development, 2010; Eichinger & Lombardo, 2003; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2006; Wan, 2011). This is because to be effective, leaders ought to be adaptable and receptive to change and development (Kovach, 1986; Mumford et al., 2007). According to Van Velsor and Leslie (1995), leaders who fail to adapt and develop are prone to derail. Per Leslie and Van Velsor (1996), adaptability entails continuous adjustments, handling complexity, and improvements in job performance over time despite changes. On the other hand, they characterized and presented development in terms of improvement resulting from direct feedback. Thus, these researchers argue leaders who are unable to adapt or develop are also unable to meet the growing demands of their jobs because they fail to grow and adapt to new concepts, operations, and expectations due to their rigidity,

inflexibility, and resistance to change (Leslie, 2022). As a result, such a mentality leads to a skills mismatch between the leader and their organization (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995).

Furthermore, derailed leaders have been found to suffer from self-defeating habits because they are not able to learn from past experiences, hence it contributes to their derailment (McCartney & Campbell, 2006). That is, they have difficulty leveraging past experiences for growth. According to research, leaders who suffered derailment held onto past habits by repeating counterproductive behaviors instead of learning from errors, mistakes, and feedback (Burke, 2006; Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989). In addition, one noteworthy point is that at the lower organizational level, individual mistakes are less consequential and could be readily forgiven, overlooked, and compensated for by the individual's other abilities. But as an individual ascends into leadership and higher management responsibilities, the consequences of repeated errors become more evident and alarming, owing to the visibility and impact a leadership role has on organizational outcomes (Lombardo et al., 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Therefore, when a leader fails to learn from prior mistakes, it becomes compounded, consequential, and evident to superiors, coworkers and subordinates. As a result, it could heighten their derailment risk.

Furthermore, another derailment characteristic was the inability to make strategic transitions (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). Researchers have also referred to this factor as lacking a strategic capacity or orientation (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988). This is because derailed leaders fail to see the bigger picture, cannot think ahead, and have difficulties adjusting to new approaches and methods (Leslie, 2022). For example, strategic transitions require a leader, through planning and preparation, to adjust towards new processes and systems that necessitate change (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002). Because derailed leaders suffer from this, they lack a

strategic understanding of emergent needs and how to function. According to Kaiser et al. (2013), strategic capacity and transitions in leadership fall under being change-oriented, which is about embracing the development of novel and superior methods of doing things. It also involves preparing one's team to be competitive by expanding team capacity, readiness, adaptability, and acceptance of innovative ideas (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011). Hence, an inability to make strategic transitions impedes leaders from making the necessary changes required of them. Thus, it negatively affects their performance and effectiveness, leading to derailment (Lombardo et al., 1988).

Also, derailed leaders have been found to lack versatility; this pertains to not developing new competencies and perspectives and thus suffering from what researchers have called a narrow functional orientation, which can be defined as having a fixed mentality and limited skill set (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; Lombardo & McCauley, 1988). Accordingly, Furnham (2018) has said that leaders at various points in their careers should embrace development, abandon outdated and flawed beliefs, and gain new insights and competencies by adapting to new concepts and embracing change. Hence, failure to do so may result in a high derailment risk due to not learning, adapting, and evolving since the leader is unable to enhance and reinvent themselves through developing new capacities (Sejeli & Mansor, 2015). Moreover, research has also shown that external factors can derail leaders. The next section expounds on those factors.

Major External Factors Contributing to Leader Derailment

According to Lombardo and Eichinger (1989), leaders can also suffer from organizational factors that cause derailment. This review on leadership derailment has identified three major external factors contributing to leader derailment: workplace bullying and toxic organizational cultures, counterproductive situational and organizational dynamics, and the absence of feedback

and workplace silence (Conger & Nadler, 2004; Gray et al., 2014; Kellerman, 2004; Lombardo et al., 1988; McCleskey, 2013).

Workplace Bullying and Toxic Organizational Cultures

Workplace bullying is behavior or derogatory comments that provoke psychological or mental harm or social isolation (Wu et al., 2019). According to the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (2023), workplace bullying can manifest in direct and indirect forms, meaning it can occur overtly or covertly. Typically, bullying entails repeated episodes or a series of actions that are meant to terrify, demoralize, insult, belittle, or embarrass a person or group of persons (Adams & Bray, 1992).

Bullying is essentially applying power to subdue and control an individual. Workplace bullying can manifest in several ways, including but not limited to spreading rumors and false accusations, constant criticism, harassment, withholding critical information or providing incorrect information, and setting unreasonable deadlines that set an individual up for failure (Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety, 2023).

In a study conducted by McCormack et al. (2017), they revealed that bullying was one of the external factors that contributed to the derailment of some leaders because it triggered self-doubt and underperformance due to being abused and stressed from bullying. Also, Gray et al. (2014) state that, in some organizations, toxic, abusive, and bullying behavior directed at leaders was discovered in their research, and the negative impact is that it affects the leader's performance, psychological well-being, and morale. As a result, the effect of abusive organizational behaviors causes frustration, stress, underperformance, and derailment (McCleskey, 2013; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Tepper, 2000; Webster, 2016).

Furthermore, Attell et al. (2017) found that bullying in the workplace causes individuals to question their sense of self-worth because they feel regularly maligned and denigrated; thus, it breeds self-doubt and self-criticism because they feel attacked and helpless (McCormack et al., 2017). Also, people who experienced workplace bullying were found to have suffered from lower organizational commitment and engagement, burnout, and absenteeism because being bullied negatively impacted their attitude, productivity, and desire to work (Houshmand et al., 2012, Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). As a result, bullying has been found to cause psychological distress and discomfort (Wu et al., 2019) and increased anxiety (Feng, 2016). According to (Eysenck et al., 2007), anxiety impedes an individual's work performance, resulting in underperformance. Furthermore, because underperformance influences a range of personal outcomes, it is a source of stress and triggers decreased motivation (Pindek, 2020). Consequently, decreased motivation leads to adverse effects. For example, research has shown that motivation is required for self-regulation, and self-regulation is more challenging to do when one is overwhelmed and stressed (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Carver & Scheier, 2001). This has consequences because, as Nelson and Hogan (2009) have stated, leaders who effectively self-regulate can avoid derailment and prevent the expression of their dark personality traits. The implication is that leaders cannot manage stress properly without self-regulation; thus, bullying is a derailment factor because it restricts self-regulation. Furthermore, Wu et al. (2019) have also stated that workplace bullying significantly affects a victim's productivity and quality of work, leading to low work efficiency. Because bullying affects productivity and quality of work, leaders become unable to perform or deliver on expected outcomes.

Accordingly, the interplay between bullying and stress leads to two derailing factors reported by scholars in the derailment literature: failure to self-regulate (Hogan et al., 2010) and

failure to meet business objectives (Burke, 2006; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). This is because bullied leaders suffer underperformance due to the harmful effects of bullying: lower self-worth, anxiety, stress, decreased motivation, poor self-regulation, low productivity, and mental and physical health problems (Attell et al., 2017; Eysenck et al., 2007; Feng, 2016; Pindek, 2020; Wu et al., 2019). These adverse effects compound to make bullied leaders unable to self-manage and satisfy essential business objectives. Therefore, bullied leaders are more likely to encounter career setbacks; as a result, they may derail due to failure to meet business expectations (Carson et al., 2012).

Furthermore, toxic organizational culture may affect the likelihood that a leader may demonstrate counterproductive and dysfunctional behaviors that could cause derailment because dysfunctional organizational cultures subtly foster counter-organizational practices, unethical conduct, and misbehaviors (Balthazard et al., 2006). These toxic and adverse outcomes, influenced by a poor organizational culture, are strongly associated with dysfunctional leader characteristics and derailment because when organizations are tolerant of detrimental conduct and fail to address them, it breeds a toxic work culture that organizational leaders may become victims of or conduits to such behaviors (Centre for Leadership Development, 2010; Padilla et al., 2007; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006; Vredenburg & Brender, 1998). Apart from workplace bullying and toxic organizational cultures, there is the problem of counterproductive situational and organizational dynamics.

Counterproductive Situational and Organizational Dynamics

Another external derailing factor found in the literature is counterproductive organizational dynamics. Two such examples are organizational restructuring and market forces

beyond the leaders' control (Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Greiner et al., 2003; Mackie, 2008; Strietzel, 2020b) and untimely exposure to higher management responsibilities before the leader has developed the necessary knowledge and maturity for their new role (Lombardo et al., 1988; Wan, 2011). This review will define that problem as premature exposure to higher management responsibilities.

According to Kovach (1989), talented managers who provide positive short-term results are frequently recognized early and quickly promoted. However, such career recognition and advancement can be disadvantageous to the individual and organization (Kovach, 1986) because the individual may not be capable of carrying out their expected objectives and thus fail to satisfy the strategic and operational needs of their organization (Larsen, 1997; Ross, 2020; Wan, 2011). The reason is handling challenges beyond one's leadership capacity will reveal unpreparedness and weaknesses (McCall, 2009). According to Van Velsor and Leslie (1995), leaders experienced derailment because they lacked the time and opportunity to build the necessary competencies required for the demands of their new role. As a result, they begin to appear incompetent, ineffective, and unproductive. In summary, a leader's previous strength is not always sufficient to handle the new demands of their organizational role (Gentry & Chappelow, 2009; Goldsmith, 2008; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).

Additionally, derailment literature reveals that organizational restructuring and market forces can cause leadership derailment (Greiner et al., 2003; Inyang, 2013; Mackie, 2008). McCall (1998) states that organizational and business changes such as mergers and acquisitions could put leaders at risk for derailment due to integration issues, cultural differences, and the complexities that arise from mergers and acquisitions. This is because leaders may feel lost and displaced due to the changes that come with organizational restructuring, thus creating a

misalignment between the leader and organization, resulting in a divergent value system, strategic differences, and an absence of shared a vision and understanding with the organization (McCauley & Lombardo, 1990; Ready, 2005). Besides the issue of counterproductive situational and organizational dynamics, there is the problem of absence of feedback and workplace silence.

The Absence of Feedback and Workplace Silence

According to Lombardo and McCauley (1988), a lack of feedback is a factor that contributes to leader derailment; because, without feedback, leaders are limited in their self-awareness and self-knowledge. Research has shown that feedback helps to accelerate and improve self-awareness and positive behavior change (Church, 2000; Sala, 2003). Consequently, a lack of feedback could mean that a leader could suffer from poor self-awareness and the other negative consequences that come with it, such as having an erroneous understanding of how they are perceived by others and difficulties with satisfying organizational expectations. In essence, leaders could derail because they are unaware of their counterproductive tendencies and behavioral gaps due to a lack of feedback (Atwater et al., 2005; Hogan et al., 2009; Smither et al., 2003).

Furthermore, according to Morrison and Rothman (2009), differences in organizational roles and hierarchy is another significant contributing factor that leads to workplace silence and a lack of feedback for leaders. This is because the higher a leader is in the organizational hierarchy, the more they are unlikely to receive honest feedback or any feedback due to their status within the organization (Sala, 2003). Hence because most organizations are structurally hierarchical, leaders within them may suffer from infrequent interaction and this dynamic could block the flow of feedback to them.

In addition, silence and lack of input and feedback from employees can be costly because research has shown that a lack of it negatively impacts relationships, creative thought, collaboration, and efficiency across all industries (Dyne et al., 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Reitz and Higgins (2020) have revealed that employees often possess critical and valuable information and are aware of how to address a problem, yet they stay silent because they believe their voices may not be taken seriously due to their lower organizational status.

Therefore, when receiving little to no feedback or when valuable feedback is withheld, leaders lack information on things they need to know about, both personally and organizationally. Accordingly, because of their higher-ranking positions, leaders may not receive clear and constructive feedback regarding their behavior or performance unless they seek it or are skilled in probing (Reitz & Higgins, 2020; Sala, 2003). Moreover, if leaders cannot avoid or overcome a particular factor or the multiple factors at large that lead to derailment, the consequences can cut across multiple areas and could be detrimental. Therefore, it is crucial to examine these consequences and the areas they affect since derailment can hurt the leader's career, coworkers' and subordinates' morale, and thus negatively impact the organization at large, including financially and reputationally (Gentry & Shanock, 2008; Simonet et al., 2018).

Consequences of Derailment

The derailment of leaders comes with various damages and turnover costs, including those associated with reputation damage to the organization, selection, recruitment, and onboarding costs resulting from the leader's failure and departure (Smith & Watkins, 1978; Wan, 2011; Wells, 2005). For example, according to Inyang (2013), leadership derailment in a highly competitive marketplace poses significant obstacles for organizations seeking to achieve objectives that produce strategic advantages. This is because leader derailment has unintended

consequences and spillover effects that affect their organizations at large, such as a leadership search slowing down activities and draining operational resources, loss of intellectual capital and poor morale among employees who were negatively impacted by the derailed leader's behavior and methods (Hernandez et al., 2021; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Simonet et al., 2018). Also, because derailment can involve a departure, it increases the turnover rate and triggers losses incurred from other invested resources such as mentoring, training, and time lost (Carson et al., 2012; Hogan & Hogan, 2001).

In addition, Lombardo et al. (1988) have claimed that the financial cost of a derailed leader is estimated to cost organizations about \$500,000 due to the costs associated with traveling, finding their replacements, and other expenses that the organization may have spent on the leader. Accordingly, Hogan et al. (2010) state that when adjusting for inflation, the amount is about \$1 million. However, another study reported that a survey completed by senior human resource executives calculated the cost of a senior derailed leader to be between \$750,000 and \$1,500,000 (DeVries & Kaiser, 2003). Additionally, further research revealed that the derailment of a senior leader might cost as much as \$2.7 million (Smart, 1999).

Research has also shown that another consequence of derailment is self-judgment, shame, pain, reputation damage, and a loss of identity and purpose in the life of the derailed leader (McCormack et al., 2017; Strietzel, 2020a). This is because the loss brings feelings of despondency and detachment. As a result, derailment negatively affects the mental health of the leader, causing a change in income level due to demotion or termination, thus impacting the leader's family resources and even straining family relationships to the point of breakdown (Gentry et al., 2019; McCall, 2003; McCormack et al., 2017). As a result of these consequences, it is important to find ways to prevent and mitigate leader derailment.

Research on Preventing and Mitigating Leader Derailment

Literature has shown that derailment is preventable and that leaders can recover from it (Hernandez et al., 2021; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2007, 1989; Strietzel, 2020a; Zhang et al., 2012). Therefore, it is crucial for the field of talent management to better understand how to play a role in preventing leader derailment (Ross, 2020). This section provides emotional intelligence goals and strategic interventions that can address derailment behavior and outcomes. The reason emotional intelligence goals are recommended and explored in detail is because of the benefits and competencies that research has shown it gives leaders, especially in overcoming leadership shortcomings, challenges, and derailment (Bryson, 2005; Gentry et al., 2015; Ruderman et al., 2003). Also, strategic interventions are equally presented; strategic interventions in this section represent the role that mentorships and executive coaches can play through insightful advice and direct involvement to prevent leaders from derailment and help derailed leaders bounce back. This is noteworthy because research has shown that executive coaches play a critical role in preventing derailment through one-on-one coaching sessions that help develop a leader (De Haan, 2016; Webb, 2006). Equally important is the role of mentoring because it has the power to influence leaders positively towards career breakthroughs and solutions (Strietzel & Erck, 2021).

In addition, although the literature in this section highlights what derailment scholars have found to be preventive and mitigative measures for leader derailment; nonetheless, other credible research was added, including canonical studies which have been referenced across several research publications by theorists from leadership development, talent management, and emotional intelligence field.

Strategic Interventions to Address Leader Derailment

This review will now explore strategies for preventing leader derailment in this subsection through interventions from executive coaches and mentors. These interventions include mentoring, executive coaching, and programs for leadership development. In addition, the definitions and benefits of mentoring, executive coaching, and leadership development programs are presented.

Mentoring

A formal mentoring program could be instituted and sponsored to target derailment factors. Formal mentoring programs have been found to be beneficial in providing guidance and insights for leaders (Strietzel & Erck, 2021). The objective of a mentoring program in the workplace is to train and support the professional development of one's mentee or employee so that they can grow and succeed (Eby et al., 2008). In addition, mentorships have been empirically proven to induce multiple positive outcomes, including career advancement and skills development (Eby et al., 2008). Furthermore, mentoring programs have also been found to foster professional stability, performance enhancement, and the development of leadership abilities to carry out organizational assignments, which also led to higher retention rates (Hegstad & Wentling, 2004). Therefore, it could conceivably be used as a preventive and mitigative measure against leader derailment. Moreover, it is not the only plausible antidote; executive coaching can also be employed against leader derailment problems.

Who Are Executive Coaches and What is Executive Coaching?

Executive coaches provide personalized intervention plans to enhance leaders' competencies and capabilities (Kilburg, 2004). The author further states that executive coaching should not be confused with not psychotherapy because it is about finding ways to address

workplace concerns and goal attainment through an executive coach. This is why according to the Association for Talent Development (n.d.), an executive coach provides a psychologically safe, organized, and reliable setting for a leader to receive support and training to help the leader understand their current skill set, gain insight into how others see them, and concentrate on establishing and developing current and future goals and the action steps needed to achieve them.

Studies have shown that executive coaching is effective at containing and addressing derailment behaviors (De Haan, 2016; De Haan & Duckworth, 2013; Nelson & Hogan, 2009). The idea of coaching as a means for training and developing leaders and using it to curtail their weaknesses and leverage their strengths has gained traction because it has successfully helped leaders to build new strengths to offset potential derailment risks while developing strategies that leverage current strengths optimally (Baker et al., 2018; Longenecker & McCartney, 2020; Nelson & Hogan, 2009). Therefore, derailment could be mitigated by providing managers with training on the abilities they will need to succeed in the next stages of their careers by highlighting how these skills differ from those they previously acquired and required (Cason et al., 2012; Centre for Leadership Development, 2010; Ross, 2022).

Furthermore, executive coaching can be placed in two key categories: developing a collaborative relationship and enhancing the learner's (leader's) perspective (Bartlett et al., 2014). According to the authors, developing a collaborative relationship is about the coachee and executive coach meeting and devising goals through solution-focused interventions to meet the coachee's needs. Moreover, enhancing the learner's perspective is about expanding the leader's understanding and outlook, after which the leader can practice self-reflections that inform accurate self-evaluation for growth. More comprehensively, Kilburg (2007) has defined executive coaching as:

A helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction. (p. 28)

In other words, coaching is a trust-based, interactive, and solutions-oriented relationship.

Furthermore, researchers have discovered that when leaders experience coaching, it has observable positive effects. To help leaders understand some critically underlined and specific residual outcomes of executive coaching, researchers have stated that executive coaching comes with numerous proven effects and benefits, including (a) increased self-awareness; (b) enhanced self-regulation; (c) increased degrees of empathy; (d) improved cognition at the workplace; (e) higher motivational levels; (f) stronger social skills; (g) better job performance; (h) psychological wellness; (i) improvement of leadership abilities; and (j) quality feedback (Bartlett et al., 2014; De Haan et al., 2019; De Haan & Duckworth, 2013; Grant & Spence, 2010; Jones et al., 2015; Kilburg, 2004; Longenecker & McCartney, 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014). Therefore, coaching is a reliable and productive method for developing leadership behaviors that can mitigate derailment behaviors (Gallos, 2006; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). Also, research has shown that leader development programs are an effective means for growing and increasing a leader's competencies.

Leadership Development Programs Are Beneficial

Research has found that leader development programs are critical because they can provide durable, meaningful learning opportunities that help leaders grow and succeed (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; McCauley & Ellen Van Velsor, 2004). An excellent example of a targeted development program for well-rounded leadership capacity development can be found in the influential research done by Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003). They provide leaders with an ample

developmental hierarchy model clustered into four categories and their respective impacts, which build upon those acquired from the preceding ones. They present particular areas for targeted leadership development. These include:

(1) intrapersonal skills: self-awareness and self-control, emotional maturity, integrity. (2) interpersonal skills: social skill, empathy, and relationship development. (3) Business skills: ability to plan, organize, monitor, and use resources. (4) Leadership skills: ability to influence, build and maintain a team, role modeling (Hogan et al., 2009, p.16).

According to Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003), the list above is a developmental hierarchy that intentionally begins with building intrapersonal capacity and, subsequently, interpersonal and leadership competencies. In principle, with the help of an executive coach, leaders can aspire or be inspired to develop specific areas they are lacking within the developmental hierarchy stated above or embrace the entire developmental model through learning and development into their skillset or repertoire. Furthermore, since the developmental model underscored the importance of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, it should be noted and elucidated to help leaders understand the significance, function, and distinction of both.

According to Day (2000), there is a categorical difference between leader and leadership development because they comprise of intrapersonal and interpersonal constructs. Day states that leader development enhances intrapersonal competencies primarily related to self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, and self-improvement. Day has also espoused that leader development aims to help leaders build personal competencies that enhance emotional maturity and a confident and accurate self-image for effective leader performance. Day explains:

Leader development results as a function of purposeful investment in human capital. The primary emphasis of the overarching development strategy is to build the intrapersonal competence needed to form an accurate model of oneself, to engage in healthy attitude

and identity development, and to use that self-model to perform effectively in any number of organizational roles. (p.585)

The point here is that leader development is essential because it helps leaders to develop competencies and capacities that research has shown a lack of leads to derailment. For example, self-awareness and self-regulation are part of the leader development cluster that is critical in avoiding or overcoming derailment behaviors (Hogan et al., 2010, Leslie, 2022). Therefore, by prioritizing leader development with the help of an executive coach, leaders can be equipped to overcome derailment behaviors that spring from a lack of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Moreover, the author further states that leadership development focuses on relationship building compared to leader development. Per Day (2000), “At the core of the difference is an orientation toward developing human capital (leader development) compared with social capital (leadership development)” (p. 605). This is important to note because leader development pertains to improving a leader’s accurate knowledge of themselves via self-awareness and making them more intrapersonally empowered to self-regulate their behaviors to avoid dysfunctional or counterproductive conduct. However, leadership development is not self-focused in construct but involves learning to build interpersonal understanding and relational capacity. It is about leveraging social and relational skills to establish better relationships and commitment with members of one's organization to achieve desired outcomes (Wenger, 1999). Therefore, leadership development is vital because it entails improving organizational and interactive skills. Its characteristics include being service-oriented, team-oriented, relational, committed, empathetic, respectful, and socially skilled and aware (Day, 2000).

As a result of the developing leader and leadership competencies, a leader will become less selfish, less self-focused, and more empathetic and relational, which research has shown is

essential for avoiding derailment (Gentry et al., 2015; Gentry & Shanock, 2008). Thus, through leader and leadership development, the attitudes and mindsets of leaders can be shaped to become more community-based and people-oriented. Furthermore, an equally important reason why leader and leadership development is essential is that another derailing factor found in literature was a failure to build and lead a team (Carson et al., 2012; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995; Zhang & Chandrasekar, 2011). However, leaders can avoid that derailment factor by developing both leader and leadership competencies due to their interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits.

In summary, the preceding subsections showed that through strategic interventions in the form of formal mentoring, executive coaching, and leader development programs, a leader could be empowered to avoid or overcome derailment and successfully navigate their development journey from one level of competence to the next by discovering where they are developmentally and where they need to get to through targeted development programs, guided one-on-one dialogues, and personalized feedback from mentors and coaches to deepen an understanding of themselves; disentangle self-imposed barriers and behaviors that could lead to derailment; and expand their repertoire of skills and competencies. Next, this review will cover leadership goals that leaders can embark upon to ensure their progress and continuous development.

Goals: Develop Emotional Intelligence

In the previous subsections, this review explored strategic interventions against derailment behaviors and highlighted the importance of combating leader derailment through them. This subsection will now lay out the benefits of emotional intelligence development and how researchers have also found it to be beneficial in preventing leader derailment behaviors. Overall, this subsection covers empathy training, self-regulation and the golden mean, self-

awareness, approaching failure as a learning opportunity and learning agility, and patience and self-compassion.

According to Van Velsor and Leslie (1995), derailment is primarily a development problem in that leaders must demonstrate personal growth to prevent and mitigate it. Hence, helping leaders develop emotional intelligence is one way to empower them to avoid or overcome derailment because emotional intelligence has been found to equip leaders with the capability to self-regulate, have self-awareness, and have better relationships with people and understand emotions (Colman, 2008; Mayer et al., 2004).

Researchers have identified two key manifestations of underdeveloped emotional intelligence as likely to cause derailment: insensitivity and difficulties with interpersonal relationships (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2007; Eichinger et al., 2009; McCall, 2003; McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Morrison et al., 1987; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). According to Webb (2006), the insensitivity and relational problems identified in the literature are intrapersonal and interpersonal because they manifest in the form of being inconsiderate and inattentive to the views and feelings of others, as well as a lack of awareness of one's developmental needs. This is important to note because, according to Ruderman et al. (2003), it is beneficial for leaders to develop emotional intelligence to gain a deeper understanding of others and themselves to avoid falling into derailment behaviors. In addition, emotional intelligence can be developed through a personalized coaching plan that guides the development of emotional intelligence competencies, which include empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation (O'Connor et al., 2019; Mckee et al., 2008). Because of a low degree of emotional intelligence, leaders will have a higher risk of derailment due to dysfunctional interpersonal tendencies (Carson et al., 2012; Furnham, 2010).

According to Goleman et al., 2009, the most effective and successful leaders possess and excel at the following emotional intelligence competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2007). This is because emotional intelligence competencies empower leaders with the right skill set to manage themselves and relate better with others (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017). Since leaders with insensitivity and interpersonal relationship issues are more prone to derail, efforts should be made to assist them in developing and improving their emotional intelligence skills to avoid exhibiting derailing behavior (Bryson, 2004; Furnham, 2010; Ruderman et al., 2003). This can be achieved through training and development programs that can help leaders develop the necessary emotional intelligence competencies that they are lacking (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003).

Seek Empathy Training

Research has found that emotional intelligence can be learned and improved through training (Gilar-Corbi et al., 2019; Lim & Lau, 2021). One such emotional intelligence competency is empathy. Empathy is critical for a leader because research has shown that derailed leaders have interpersonal relationship problems due to a lack of empathy (Leslie, 2022). According to Bove (2019), empathy is valuable, and its benefits are personal and interpersonal. It has been found to have prosocial characteristics in that it is the capacity to understand and put oneself in another person's situation; it is the ability to care enough to listen and feel another person's emotions, experiences, and viewpoint during an interaction, and the capability to be considerate (Decety et al., 2016; Hardee, 2003; Szalita, 1976). Empathy has also been proven to have multiple positive impacts on the well-being of others, such as being heard, supported, and

validated during interactions (Decety & Fotopoulou, 2015). Therefore, lacking empathy can be detrimental to leaders because they would not know how to care or connect with the people they lead. Statistics have shown that managers who enhance their empathic leadership capabilities improve their organizational efficacy and are more likely to achieve and enjoy continued professional success (Riess, 2017). One of the reasons empathetic leaders benefit organizations is that they can successfully establish, understand, and maintain relationships with superiors, co-workers, and subordinates (Gentry, 2024; Gentry et al., 2015).

According to Ekaman and Goleman (2007), there are three types of empathy, and they are at different tiers. This is important to note because leaders need to know that empathy comes in levels, and there is room to grow empathetically. This is critical because empathy is not an end but a journey towards being kinder and more considerate. As a result, the authors posit that there is cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and compassionate empathy. Cognitive empathy (perspective taking) is the capacity to comprehend another person's perspective and ideas without emotional engagement or attunement. Emotional empathy (affective empathy) is the ability to sense and feel another person's emotions as though one was experiencing their situation. Moreover, compassionate empathy (empathic concern) involves understanding, feeling, and helping another individual. It comprises a mix of cognitive and emotional empathy in which one comprehends another person's perspective and is emotionally attuned and impacted to the point of responding with care and direct involvement. The authors further state that all three forms of empathy are teachable and learnable (Ekaman & Goleman, 2007; Goleman, 2008). Although empathy was previously believed to be an innate ability that could not be learned and developed, research has demonstrated that this essential human skill is malleable and can be taught (Riess, 2017).

With empathy training, leaders will become more patient and sensitive. It will equip them with the ability to be generous with their time and attention by actively listening to understand the perspective and experiences of others (Bellet, 1991; Dohrenwend, 2018). Because empathy empowers leaders with the emotional intelligence competency to care for and authentically connect with others, it should be embraced by leaders to help prevent and mitigate their derailment behaviors since it helps to improve a leader's sensitivity and relational ability (Gentry et al., 2015; Ruderman et al., 2003). Thus, having empathy could help prevent derailing behaviors of abrasiveness, narcissism, poor relationships, and failure to manage a team tactfully (De Haan & Kasozi, 2014; Furnham, 2010).

Self-Regulation and Finding the Golden Mean

The inability to manage oneself has been found to be a critical factor that causes leader derailment (Hogan et al., 2010). To effectively manage others and organizational teams, certain leadership development models emphasize the importance of first managing and mastering oneself (Rima, 2000). Therefore, leaders should seek to grow in their ability to self-regulate. This is crucial because, according to McCall and Lombardo (1983), successful and effective leaders were those who were able to remain calm in high-pressure situations and self-regulate impulses and actions (Furnham et al., 2012; Judge et al., 2009; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Thus, by developing a self-regulating competency, leaders will be capable of self-monitoring and self-managing their behaviors (Carver & Scheier, 2001).

Furthermore, research has shown that moderation is critical to avoid actionable overuse or underuse of one's traits and qualities. Some researchers have conceptualized moderation as the golden mean (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011; Seligman, 2023). The golden mean is using the

proper combination of character strengths in the right proportion and the appropriate context (Niemiec, 2019b). That is, employing the optimal range and rejecting the maximal and minimal use of one's qualities to avoid too little or extreme use. The critical component of the golden mean and its relevance to derailment studies is that it entails using one's traits reasonably in the proper context and not just in any unrelated situation to avoid abuse, overuse, or underuse. This review will explore three possible scenarios to highlight the importance of the golden mean. A courageous leader may employ bravery and always take risks; moreover, in times of grave danger or uncertainty, being cautious and circumspect to avoid potential dangers and mistakes might be the more prudent and plausible thing to do. But when a leader uses courage excessively and out of context, it could become reckless and counterproductive when applied in a manner unsuitable for the situation. According to Kellett (2017), behaviors that often result in overutilizing a single positive characteristic may produce favorable outcomes in the short term but may pose problems in the long run. For instance, a leader who is typically thorough and highly meticulous towards details may be viewed and celebrated as detail oriented. But over time, that same leader could later be perceived as obsessive, perfectionistic, and a micromanager who causes coworkers and subordinates to feel exhausted with details without regard for moderation. According to research conducted by Barros et al. (2022), people who were found to be narcissistic (an unhealthy preoccupation with oneself) frequently overused and misapplied certain character strengths, which resulted in the underutilization of humility.

In addition, McQuaid (2017) states that when applying one's strengths, it is crucial to identify the optimal skills for the situation; doing so has been proven to generate favorable outcomes which were tied to positive coping strategies and resilience (e.g., exercising self-regulation, seeking help, and being mindful). Moreover, overuse and underuse were negatively

correlated with poor coping strategies and unregulated, poor emotional states (Kamushadze & Martskvishvili, 2021). For example, when a leader's team looks lost, disorganized, or unmotivated, the leader can employ a character strength of curiosity by gently asking good questions and actively listening to decode the problem within the team. However, an improper use of character strengths could be assertiveness in that context. This is why Niemiec (2019a) has stated that when character strengths are expressed in the right measure and in the appropriate situation, it leads to beneficial outcomes for oneself and others, especially during times of adversity and opportunity. Therefore, when leaders can self-manage and self-regulate appropriately, it leads to beneficial outcomes that prevent derailment behaviors (Kaiser et al., 2013; Kellett, 2017). However, to manage themselves appropriately, leaders need to gain a deeper awareness and understanding of themselves (McIntosh & Rima, 2007; Rima, 2000).

Explore Self-Awareness and Self-Reflection for Personal Development

Eichinger and Lombardo (2003) conducted a study that showed that a lack of or low self-awareness was predictive of managerial failure and derailment. Moreover, self-awareness was found to be a critical competency in avoiding derailment because it helps leaders gain a better understanding of themselves (Gentry & Shanock, 2008; Kilburg, 2000). According to Hogan et al. (2010), leaders who are unaware of their dark-side tendencies and how those tendencies affect them individually and those around them derail. Hence, developing self-awareness helps leaders to identify their blind spots (Baumeister & Sher, 1988; Dotlich & Cairo, 2007).

Researchers present self-awareness as taking an honest look at oneself by becoming the focus of one's inward thought and developing an understanding of one's environment and how others perceive oneself (Carden et al., 2021; Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Morin, 2011; Showry &

Manasa, 2014; Rochat, 2003; Sutton et al., 2015). Fenigstein et al. (1975) later revealed that there are two main types of self-awareness: internal, solely focusing attention on the self; and external, focusing on their environment and understanding how people perceive oneself within a social context. This is noteworthy because leaders should know the motives behind their actions and the blind spots they have through self-awareness. Also, it is good for them to understand how others perceive their behavior. Holzman (n.d.) has stated that “to grow, a leader must first see the gap between how they need to behave and how they actually behave” (para. 1). That is, self-awareness can play a significant role in helping leaders to discover how they behave, how others perceive them, and where they need to improve upon.

According to Sutton et al. (2015), self-awareness has been found to have interpersonal value and is positively associated with better communication skills, higher confidence, and occupational well-being. This is because self-awareness enables individuals to make better decisions due to its impact on enhancing one's understanding of what is necessary through goal-setting behaviors shaped by self-regulated learning (Ridley et al., 1992). Self-Awareness has also been linked to enabling authentic leadership (Eriksen, 2009). Authentic leadership is only possible when leaders know themselves, are honest about who they are and are committed to improving and becoming the best versions of themselves. This is important to note because, through authenticity, leaders can be honest about their motivations and shortcomings, thus making it more unlikely that they will employ dishonest leadership practices on subordinates or obscure their weaknesses through deceit by deflecting and blaming others.

Furthermore, research has shown that self-awareness gives leaders a better understanding and capacity to pay attention to other people and room to understand them better (Eurich, 2018). According to Fletcher and Bailey (2003), individuals with self-awareness are better and more

effective in their organizational roles. This is because, with self-awareness, an individual becomes internally and externally aware and empowered with the emotional skills to understand the consequences of their actions, can identify emotional cues, and can connect better with others. As a result, self-aware leaders can build stronger relationships that aid collaboration and teamwork because of their level of internal and external awareness (Eurich, 2018). Therefore, without that ability, achieving organizational success becomes improbable. Showry and Manasa (2014) have also posited that having self-awareness is an excellent indicator of success. The reason is that one cannot lead others if one does not understand oneself in terms of potential, propensity, strength, and limitation. It is essential to note that successful leaders know their potential and can leverage it appropriately, and when they become aware of their limitations, they can move to address them (Kovach, 1989). Therefore, it is arguable that it is only possible to lead others successfully and optimally when having self-awareness.

To develop and understand self-awareness, leaders should see it as an endless journey rather than a destination. According to Jung (1967), self-awareness is more of a practice, a journey toward continuous individuation that increases one's understanding of oneself through growing in awareness of various aspects that one has. In addition, multiple researchers have stated that the key to self-improvement and development starts with the process of self-awareness (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Mintzberg, 2004; Sala, 2003). To develop self-awareness, leaders should reflect and seek feedback via the 360-degree loop (Gentry & Shanock, 2008; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017; Yii Tang et al., 2013). The 360-degree feedback loop has been found to be one of the most effective methods to enhance self-awareness because it provides meaningful input and evaluation from subordinates, peers, and supervisors and thus allows individuals to collect and assess feedback data from various people from

different perspectives regarding one's performance and behavior (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Nesbit, 2012; Van Velsor et al., 1993; Yui Tang et al., 2013). Also, through feedback, people improve themselves because it is the most influential factor influencing learning and performance due to the insights the recipient garners from it (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

In addition, Edmondson and Dimmock (2020) state that leaders can hire a coach or engage in experiential learning with others to grow in self-awareness and thus receive quality external feedback about their abilities, tendencies, and behavior. The authors further state that this could help the leader to avoid the Dunning-Kruger Effect, which is the tendency to unknowingly exaggerate and overestimate one's competencies despite lacking those competencies (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). This is crucial because research has shown that leaders who exaggerated and overestimated their skills and expertise by believing they had certain competencies when their subordinates, peers, and superiors thought otherwise were linked with derailment (Cullen et al., 2014; Eichinger & Lombardo, 2003). Thus, knowing and avoiding the Dunning-Kruger Effect is critical because a discrepancy in how leaders perceive and evaluate themselves and how their coworkers rate them reflects potential derailment. Therefore, it is essential for leaders to have an accurate knowledge of themselves, their performance, and the behaviors they display so they can course-correct them if need be.

Research has also revealed that everyone has blind spot bias. Biased blind spots refer to individuals being far less inclined to recognize bias in themselves but are quick to recognize bias in others (Pronin et al., 2002, 2004). Researchers further revealed that individuals tend to believe they are less biased than the average person (Scopelliti et al., 2015). This is important to note because although biases are generally seen as undesirable, they appear when self-enhancement bias is displayed, in that one often views their behaviors more favorably and positively rather

than negatively or within a normative criterion (Krueger, 1998; Pronin, 2007). Consequently, this could lead to an inaccurate and biased self-perception that impairs an accurate knowledge of a leader's actual capacity, potential, tendency, and behavior.

Furthermore, Scopelliti et al. (2015) state that biased blind spots have detrimental consequences on individuals and systems that rely on self-assessment for information. Thus, this raises the need for external feedback to develop an accurate awareness of the self and discover blind spots that could cause derailment. This is why research has shown that feedback is critical to accurately knowing how one thinks and behaves (Hogan & Hogan, 2009). Thus, to empower leaders to become more self-aware, leaders could seek the help of an executive coach, utilize 360-degree surveys, or join an experiential learning group (Baker et al., 2018; De Haan & Kasozi, 2014; Edmondson & Dimmock, 2020; Nelson & Hogan, 2009).

Approaching Failure as a Learning Opportunity and a Leader's Learning Agility

Literature has shown that leaders who are unable to learn from mistakes run the risk of derailing (Hogan et al., 2009; Leslie, 2022; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989). According to Childs (2019), a leader may attempt to control everything to avoid mistakes, but errors are inevitable, nonetheless. Because errors and mistakes are inevitable, decades of psychological research have investigated human failings and revealed that individuals tend to struggle to learn from mistakes and respond to failures purposefully and constructively (Maxwell, 2017; Pritchett, 2012; Robson, 2022). Accordingly, Kovach (1989) has stated that it is vital for failed and derailed leaders to reject perceiving their shortcomings as conclusive but rather as a learning opportunity. This is essential to note because for a derailed leader to bounce back after derailment, they need to alter their interpretation of failure and perceive it as a learning opportunity to learn from their prior

mistakes and leverage it for growth (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2007). This is why Lombardo and Eichinger (1989) have also stated that leaders should discover how to use their past experiences for growth because it has been found to be beneficial for continuous self-improvement and development (McCauley & Ellen Van Velsor, 2004).

Furthermore, Eichinger et al. (2009) stated that lacking learning agility increases one's risk of derailment. Accordingly, such a leader may lack passion for learning and curiosity and cannot course correct when a situation requires it due to inadequate or outdated knowledge. This is why Koonce (2020) says learning agility correlates with leadership agility, which is a master competency and multiplicity of skills employed against challenges and complexities to ensure continuous relevance, success, and growth (Joiner, 2019; Joiner & Josephs, 2007). Moreover, learning agility means a leader can learn new things by unlearning old beliefs and practices, is willing to learn from experiences and applies those learnings to new situations (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). Learning agility characteristics include curiosity, reflection, mental flexibility, adaptability, and openness to new experiences (De Meuse, 2017). Learning agility has been found to be a key criterion for leadership effectiveness (Bouland-van Dam et al., 2022).

Additionally, Argyris and Schön (1978) have stated that one of the critical components of learning entails error identification and correction. Moreover, the authors also emphasize that learning involves expanding one's capability and effectiveness through openness (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Therefore, when leaders lack a passion for learning, fail to identify errors, or are defensive about their mistakes, Argyris (1991) has noted that there will be a lack of development and growth: growth because they are unable to acknowledge and subsequently address flaws, shortcomings, and inadequacies through learning, reflection, and openness (Smith, 2013). Furthermore, researchers have shown that organizations that do not support their leaders in

learning and that are also highly unforgiving of mistakes impede their leaders and their organization's growth and impact (Centre for Leadership Development, 2010; McCauley & Ellen Van Velsor, 2004). Consequently, such a work environment could create a workplace where leaders feel fearful and defensive after making decisions, and subsequently, it could create an environment where fear is rampant; risk is discouraged, innovation is absent, and learning from mistakes is improbable.

In addition, research has shown that expanding and broadening one's competencies are critical in avoiding leader derailment (Kovach, 1989; Williams et al., 2012). Hence, without a learning agility, a leader may also suffer from an over-dependence on past methods, which prevents them from seeing the importance of learning and development (Kaiser & Overfield, 2011). This is critical to note because research has indicated that humans tend to repeat actions that may have worked in the past and tend to get stuck on those same methods of doing things, thus creating an overdependence that hinders adroitness, versatility, and one's prospect for embracing newer approaches and behaviors for success (Pritchett, 2012). This is why Lombardo and Eichinger (2006) have shown that leaders with a pattern of broadening their perspective, skills, and knowledge tend not to suffer derailment but are more agile, adaptable, and effective.

Therefore, having an attitude and willingness to learn after failure and cultivating a learning agility is crucial for leadership stability and growth. However, research has shown that derailed leaders need to deal with mistakes better because they are often defensive and do not prioritize development (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Thus, an executive coach could devise an intervention plan to help them overcome such counterproductive mindsets (Webb, 2006). In summary, leaders can avoid

counterproductive tendencies and enjoy continuous growth by changing their response and attitude to failure by embracing learning and development (Argyris, 1991).

Embrace Patience and Self-Compassion

Developing emotional intelligence competencies and other character strengths is a process that takes time (Goleman, 2000). Because of that, a leader will need to embrace self-compassion and patience (Carr, n.d.). Research has shown that one-way leaders demonstrate emotional intelligence is by practicing self-compassion. Self-compassionate leaders are able to stay calm when in distress, are more hopeful, and tend to overcome setbacks because they do not berate themselves in times of adversity (Fernandez & Stern, 2020; Neff et al., 2007). Berating oneself through self-flagellation has been shown to undermine stability, motivation for self-improvement, and learning (Breines & Chen, 2012; Chen, 2018). Moreover, self-compassion has been shown to make leaders better because it empowers them to navigate adversity and experience clarity, optimism, and resilience when facing self-doubt and hardships (Fernandez & Stern, 2020; Neff et al., 2007). In addition, self-compassion has also been strongly linked to accountability, meaning that it equips one to be more open and honest with oneself and others (Leary et al., 2007). This is why Neff has shown that self-compassionate individuals had a greater tendency to be more self-aware to make accurate self-assessments (Neff, 2009).

Research has also shown that mental toughness, which is a quality characterized by an unwillingness to be deterred, a resolve to accomplish or complete a goal or task even when circumstances are becoming increasingly negative or dire, and the ability to regulate one's emotions and remain steadfast, persisting under pressure or competition despite whatever the odds or results may be (Kent, 2004), is not a remedy to address all challenges because it can

backfire and make oneself less hopeful and unsuccessful when individuals obsess and berate themselves over a problem when change and results do not occur at the expected rate (Sauer, 2022). Consequently, without self-compassion, the mindset shifts towards shame and self-blame.

However, according to McKee et al. (2008), one should embrace self-compassion to see change and renewal because self-compassion is crucial in a leader's journey. Self-compassion is the courage to be kind to oneself when experiencing hardship or difficulties, whether due to internal shortcomings and limitations or external life situations and adversity (Athanasakou et al., 2020; Neff, 2022; Şenyuva et al., 2013). Self-compassion involves being mindful of and attending to one's needs. It requires reflecting on and being receptive to oneself by consciously reconnecting to neglected areas of oneself that bring joy and inspiration. It is about extending compassion to oneself and focusing on and engaging in events that evoke feelings of kindness, hope, and joy (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021; McKee et al., 2008).

For the above reasons, researchers have argued that self-compassion is a crucial and beneficial emotional intelligence competency (Fernandez & Stern, 2020; Teleb & Al Awamleh, 2013). According to Wiens and McKee (2016), the process of incorporating a new positive habit can be assisted by embracing self-compassion to counter and avoid self-defeating thoughts and habits. Wiens and McKee also state that the absence of self-compassion frequently causes leaders to suffer stress, exhaustion, and burnout. This is because self-compassion helps leaders embrace self-care and empowers them to avoid self-neglect, self-criticism, and self-flagellation, especially during times of stress, pain, and inadequacy.

Furthermore, Kosirnik et al. (2022) have noted in their research that self-compassion is an essential and excellent antidote when self-doubt arises. This is because self-compassion makes one mentally strong, healthy, and motivated to avoid self-condemnation, which is being

overly critical and judgmental of oneself (Neff, 2022). Instead, self-compassion empowers one to employ a mindful and purposeful approach towards oneself, which has been shown to decrease negative mental states like shame, anxiety, self-doubt, and depression (Neff et al., 2007; Schuling et al., 2020). Research has also shown that such a mindful and caring practice towards oneself is a source of a positive coping mechanism since it motivates individuals to make healthy changes that enable healing and even motivation to achieve one's goals (Kirmayer, 2021).

Therefore, leaders who experience self-condemnation because of derailment or have spotted derailing behaviors in themselves should embrace and develop self-compassion because self-compassion will enable leaders to become better, more honest, accountable, and less defensive in their dealings with others and themselves (Leary et al., 2007). In summary, self-compassion is a critical emotional intelligence competency because it concerns the genuine care and welfare of oneself. As a result, leaders who embrace self-compassion will be better equipped to avoid and overcome self-sabotaging thoughts, habits, and behaviors that could lead to derailment.

Gaps in the Literature and Research Question

Some research suggests that derailment can happen due to interacting factors instead of a singular factor (Centre for Leadership Development, 2010; Hogan et al., 2010; Inyang, 2013; Padilla et al., 2007; Tett & Guterman, 2000). As a result, a leader's personality and habits, the behavior of others (followers, coworkers, superiors), conducive situational dynamics (i.e., mergers and acquisitions, economic downturns, political instability, environmental disruptions), and a toxic organizational culture could singularly cause derailment or interact to trigger outcomes that cause leader derailment. Therefore, for further academic inquiry, there is a significant interest in exploring the executive coaches' voice on the internal and external factors

of leader derailment to validate existing research and explore their insights and experiences with derailed leadership.

Accordingly, to gain a deeper and better understanding of leader derailment, this paper notes that one primary gap is the executive coach's perspective on the internal and external factors of leader derailment. As a result, this study seeks to explore that. This is critical because executive coaches can provide knowledge and insight into leader derailment issues in different industries and organizations and recommend how best to prevent and mitigate them because they can provide knowledge and insight into leader derailment issues due to the fact that they are often consulted for leadership developments and interventions (Gallos, 2006; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Mackie, 2016; Nelson & Hogan, 2009; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003).

Therefore, such research could conceivably lead to a better understanding of derailment factors and save organizations a great deal of time and expense incurred from the derailment of leaders. In addition, it can save individuals from painful and detrimental psychological and career experiences. Consequently, to understand derailment issues and provide reliable preventive measures in a broader sense, it is essential to have a perspective that extends beyond self-assessments and post hoc explanations provided by coworkers and organizations since those perspectives could be biased and thus suffer from validity issues and lack of broader insight. Therefore, examining executive coaches' perspectives on leader derailment provides the advantage of an external perspective that includes having worked with multiple leaders who have derailment risks or have already derailed.

With the aim of comprehensively understanding leader derailment, this research is designed to actively involve executive coaches. Their insights into the factors that led to the career setbacks of derailed leaders, as well as their strategies for determining the next course of

action, are invaluable. This research aims to validate existing research and discover novel factors and future preventive measures by understanding leader derailment through the lens of executive coaches. The specific research question that will guide this study is reintroduced below. The research question that this study seeks to explore is straightforward and will be explored iteratively. The question is: What do executive coaches perceive as the major internal and external factors derailing leaders?

Conclusion

Leadership derailment is a severe and persistent problem that leads to more leaders failing rather than succeeding (Furnham, 2010). Therefore, preventing derailment is critical. However, one needs to comprehensively understand the major factors that cause leader derailment to prevent it. This review categorized and discussed those factors as internal and external and showed the consequences of derailment on a personal and organizational level. This review also provided preventive and mitigating remedies that can help leaders develop their leadership capacities and thus grow broadly in their emotional intelligence competencies through the participation in executive coaching, mentoring, and other training and development programs that are tailored for their growth. These strategies and goals included (a) mentoring, executive coaching, and leadership development programs; (b) empathy training and self-regulation; (c) exploring self-awareness; (d) approaching failure as a learning opportunity and a leader's learning agility; (e) embracing patience and self-compassion.

Given the personal and organizational consequences of leader derailment, it is crucial to gather and assess insightful ways to understand it better and prevent it. In this endeavor, the perspective and expertise of executive coaches are invaluable. Their insights and

recommendations can significantly contribute to the prevention and mitigation of leader derailment, underscoring the importance of their role in this process.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This research explored derailment issues through a general qualitative methodology. The general qualitative methodology helped this research provide ample empirical data that enabled the presentation of executive coaches' factual and personal experiences with derailed leadership.

General Qualitative Research

General qualitative research is an inductive and exploratory approach within social science research that focuses on understanding and interpreting the complexities of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Thomas, 2006). This methodology emphasizes capturing rich, contextualized data to uncover trustworthy, underlying meanings, patterns, and themes (Krefting, 1991). It involves subjective interpretation and seeks to explore the perspectives, beliefs, and motivations of individuals or groups (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). General qualitative research employs various data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis to generate in-depth insights that generate new theoretical perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The findings are often presented in narrative form, providing a deeper understanding of the studied case or phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Research Timeline, Format, and Participant Selection Criteria

This study was executed via a comprehensive sequence of interviews involving different executive coaches. These interviews made it possible to collect, assess, and present their expert insights, utilizing a virtual format that delved into their perspectives on leader derailment issues. Additionally, this study employed structured questionnaires to collect pertinent demographic and contextual background data from the participating coaches. The selection criteria for each executive coach were predicated on having at least seven years of practical experience in

executive coaching and knowledge of derailed leaders. As a result, this study engaged and recruited a sample size of 22 qualified and trained executive coaches from the International Coaching Federation (ICF), Hogan Assessments Systems, Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching, Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC), Kaiser Leadership Solutions, Maxwell Leadership, Chief Executive Alliance LLC, Sound Board Inc, and the Co-Active Training Institute (CTI). The coaches selected for the interviews were professionals who had received training and certification from the organizations stated above. These organizations are globally recognized organizations that set professional coaching standards and offer accreditation and certification programs for coaches. They adhere to the highly regarded ICF code of ethics and its core competencies, which enables them to provide high-quality coaching services. As a result, this research preferred to recruit them because they were well-respected, trained, and certified coaches. This approach ensured adequate and valid acquisition of empirical data.

Furthermore, as this study adhered to a sample size of 22 executive coaches, it gave this research an ample number of participants who offered pertinent insights into the phenomenon of leader derailment. This gave the research empirical richness and a well-rounded synthesis of the information collected. This study began in September 2022 and was completed in May 2024. The participant interviews took place from November 27, 2023, to February 4, 2024. The interviews were conducted individually, providing an in-depth understanding of each participant's experiences and perspectives. The interview questions included a range of sub-topics, including the participants' coaching experiences, challenges, and, most importantly, their perspectives on leader derailment. The participants shared personal stories and experiences,

providing a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to leader derailment and its impact on individuals and organizations.

Importance of Diverse Voices

In addition to having at least 7 years of coaching experience, there was a diversity criteria. The diversity participant criteria for this study were based on race, gender, and sex. This is because studies have shown that diverse groups excel effectively in problem-solving (Hong & Page, 2004; Page, 2007). The inclusion of these diverse coaches was instrumental. The participants in this study were a diverse mix of 14 male and 8 female coaches from various backgrounds and coaching enterprises who brought a unique perspective to this study.

This research made diversity an important factor because research has shown that it can lead to higher-quality studies (Campbell et al., 2013). As a result, incorporating diversity principles into this study was important because of its powerful and transformative impact on research quality and social relevance. Therefore, this study embraced the positive effects of diversity in research. This is because embracing diversity in perspectives, methodologies, and sources enhances the validity and robustness of findings (Fuentes et al., 2020; Page, 2007, 2008). By being mindful of the various cultural, racial, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds available, a study can become more inclusive and reflective of the diverse realities present within the studied group. Secondly, diversity can help foster ethical standards by ensuring rigor and fairness in the research process, thus enhancing comprehensiveness in the research. This can be achieved by engaging with diverse voices, acknowledging their agency, promoting respect and dignity, and incorporating safeguards against the perpetuation of biases and imbalances. Thus, a study incorporating diversity principles can offer better insights that are more comprehensive, contextually sensitive, actionable, and relevant for diverse stakeholders. Therefore, research

integrating diverse principles contributes to dismantling primarily misunderstandings, stereotypes, poor practices, and counterproductive structures and beliefs (Boulware et al., 2022; Hall & Tandon, 2017).

In academia, diversity is not just a fundamental tenet, but a transformative force within responsible scholarship. A study that fully embraces such principles has the potential to revolutionize the academic environment, valuing all voices and perspectives, and fostering a society of inclusivity and intellectual growth. By embracing these transformative values and principles, this research sought to set a precedent for future research endeavors that respect the rich tapestry of human experiences. In summary, the incorporation of diverse principles within this dissertation was not just pivotal, but a catalyst that helped gather different professional voices, enhancing this study's research quality, relevance, and academic richness.

Data Collection Method

The qualitative data acquired from the interviews were meticulously analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes and sub-themes. By facilitating this analytical process, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, coded, and subsequently subjected to in-depth categorization. Also, this research upheld the ethical considerations of confidentiality and privacy: a commitment to maintaining anonymity for all research participants who took part in this leader derailment study.

Interview Protocol and The Eight Characteristics

This research employed the helpful and practical framework outlined in *Table 5.1 Considerations for Developing and Conducting Interviews* (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 151). Table 5.1 outlines eight characteristics that highlight crucial aspects to consider when conducting

qualitative interviews. These characteristics helped to ensure the rigor and depth of the interview process for this qualitative research.

The eight characteristics outlined by Ravitch and Carl (2016) are principally: “relational, contextual/contextualized, non-evaluative, person-centered, temporal, partial, subjective, and nonneutral” (pp. 148–150). Each of these characteristics provided a deep understanding and a comprehensive guide for this research in developing and conducting interviews that prioritize meaningful and in-depth data collection. In incorporating these eight considerations into this study’s methodology, this research ensured that the interviews were conducted sensitively, capturing the rich and diverse perspectives of the participants while minimizing any potential biases or limitations. This framework also enabled this study to establish a strong rapport with the participants, fostering an environment of trust and openness during the interview process. Below is an overview and explanation of each of the eight characteristics that this study has extracted from Ravitch and Carl (2016).

1. Relational: This characteristic emphasizes the importance of building a relationship between the researcher and the interviewee. It acknowledges that interviews are not just data-gathering interactions but involve human connections. Thus, building rapport and trust with participants can lead to more candid and insightful responses.
2. Contextual/Contextualized: Interviews should be conducted within a specific context or setting relevant to the research topic. The context provides a backdrop for understanding the interviewee's experiences and perspectives. As the researcher, there was a mindfulness of how context influences the interviewee's responses.
3. Non-evaluative: This characteristic, underscores the need for interviewers to remain nonjudgmental during the interview process. Researchers are urged to avoid expressing

their personal opinions or passing judgment on the interviewee's responses. This is because an evaluative stance can hinder open and honest communication.

4. **Person-Centered:** Interviews should prioritize the interviewee's experiences, perspectives, and narratives. Researchers are advised to listen attentively and adapt their questions to explore the interviewee's unique viewpoint. This approach will allow this researcher to experience a deeper understanding of the interviewee's world.
5. **Temporal:** Temporality refers to the consideration of time in interviews. Researchers are told to be aware of how time affects the interview, such as the timing relative to the participant's experiences or the interview duration. Therefore, timing can influence the richness of the data collected.
6. **Partial:** Partiality acknowledges that interviews capture only a portion of an individual's experiences and perspectives. Hence, researchers should remember that they cannot capture every aspect of an interviewee's life, so they should recognize the partial nature of the collected data and interpret it accordingly.
7. **Subjective:** Interviews are inherently subjective because they rely on the interviewee's perceptions, interpretations, and feelings. Researchers should, therefore, be mindful that the interview data reflects the interviewee's subjectivity and should not be treated as objective facts.
8. **Nonneutral:** This characteristic acknowledges that researchers bring their perspectives, biases, and backgrounds to the interview process. Researchers should be reflexive and aware of their influence on the interview, striving for transparency and minimizing any undue impact on the interviewee's responses.

These eight characteristics were collectively employed to guide this study's qualitative interviews, which were sensitive, ethical, rich, and meaningful. By adhering to these principles, this research believes that the eight characteristics enhanced the validity and reliability of the study's findings and ensured that the interview process was respectful and responsive to the participants' experiences and contexts.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, this study employed Ravitch and Carl's (2016) three-step process of data organization and management, immersive engagement, and writing representation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, pp. 237–238). This process is designed to guide researchers through the various phases of conducting qualitative research. Below is an overview:

Data Organization and Management:

- **Data Collection:** In this initial stage, the researcher collects qualitative data through interviews, observations, or document analysis. This data can be diverse, including transcripts, field notes, audio recordings, or visual materials.
- **Data Organization:** At this phase, the researcher systematically organizes and manages the collected data. This involves creating a data management plan, including naming conventions, file organization, and data storage strategies. Proper organization ensures that data can be easily accessed and analyzed later in the research process.
- **Data Reduction:** At this point, the researcher may engage in data reduction activities like transcribing interviews, coding, and summarizing observations. This process involves transforming raw data into manageable units for analysis.

Immersive Engagement:

- **Data Analysis:** In this stage, the researcher engages deeply with the data to uncover patterns, themes, and insights. This often involves iterative cycles of coding, categorizing, and refining codes. Qualitative analysis techniques like thematic analysis, content analysis, or grounded theory may be employed.
- **Constant Comparison:** The researcher is advised to continuously compare new data with previously analyzed data to refine categories and themes. This iterative process helps ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.
- **Theoretical Saturation:** At this stage, the researcher aims to reach theoretical saturation, where collecting additional data no longer generates new insights or themes. This signals that data collection can be concluded.

Writing Representation:

- **Interpretation and Synthesis:** At this point, the researcher synthesizes the analyzed data to develop a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions or objectives. This stage involves interpreting the data in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks.
- **Writing:** The researcher then writes up their findings in a comprehensive research report or article. This includes detailing the research design, methods, data analysis, and the presentation of key findings and insights.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Throughout the writing process, the researcher must address ethical considerations, such as ensuring participant confidentiality and obtaining informed consent.

Overall, the three-step process of *data organization and management, immersive engagement, and writing representation* was utilized to ensure that this study was cyclical and

iterative, as qualitative research often involves revisiting earlier stages based on new insights or questions that arise during analysis or writing. Additionally, this research employed two data analysis software tools, Dedoose and Otter.ai, to assist in managing and analyzing the datasets. By following the structured process stated above, this study systematically organized the research process, engaged deeply with the data captured, and effectively communicated the results and findings.

Validity Concerns, Mitigation Plans, Assumptions, and Limitations

According to Maxwell (2013), in research, there is always a risk for validity threats, such as the researcher's bias and reactivity. Accordingly, he states that bias is what the researcher prefers to select and how their values and beliefs influence their interpretation of the data and findings. Reactivity is the influence enacted by the researcher on the setting or individuals being studied. Given that fact, this study took extra measures to address researcher bias and reactivity. This was executed using Maxwell's (2013) eight-step validity test checklist. Maxwell's eight-step validity test checklist is based on:

1. **Descriptive Validity:** This step ensures that the research findings accurately and thoroughly describe the phenomenon under investigation. Researchers should strive for a rich and comprehensive description of the data collected.
2. **Interpretive Validity:** Interpretive validity pertains to the researcher's ability to interpret the meaning and significance of the data collected accurately. It ensures that interpretations are grounded in the data and do not introduce bias or preconceived notions.

3. **Theoretical Validity:** In this step, researchers assess whether their findings align with existing theories or concepts in the field. This helps establish the theoretical relevance and coherence of the study.
4. **Methodological Congruence:** Methodological congruence refers to the alignment between the research methods and questions or objectives. Researchers should ensure that the chosen methods are appropriate for the research goals.
5. **Criteria-based Validity:** This step involves using predetermined criteria to evaluate the validity of the research. Researchers may establish criteria for judging the quality and trustworthiness of the data and the research process.
6. **Process Validity:** Process validity focuses on the transparency and documentation of the research process. Researchers should provide clear documentation of data collection and analysis procedures to enhance the credibility of their findings.
7. **Outcome Validity:** Outcome validity assesses the impact and implications of the research. Researchers should consider whether the research findings have practical significance and relevance for stakeholders or the field.
8. **Pragmatic Validity:** Pragmatic validity concerns the usefulness and applicability of the research findings in real-world contexts. The researcher should consider the practical implications of their work and how it can inform decision-making or practice.

This research applied these eight steps collectively to form a comprehensive validity assessment framework for this qualitative research. They helped ensure that this research was rigorous, trustworthy, and relevant. Furthermore, this research operated with academic knowledge that executive coaches have insights into leadership problems and can provide solutions and a narrative of how derailment transpires. This assumption is based on literature

indicating that executive coaches have been utilized as interventions to help leaders facing a career crisis and an array of other complex professional challenges (Bartlett et al., 2014; Nelson & Hogan, 2009).

Lastly, it is imperative and noteworthy to acknowledge that this researcher substantially understood leadership derailment issues before and during the research process. This familiarity underscores this researcher's passion and commitment to prevent leaders from failing and derailing. Overall, this research used judicious and meticulous methodologies to uphold objectivity throughout the study. This approach prevented any inadvertent liking and predilection to a particular conclusion that could have guided subjects towards biased or preconceived notions associated with the researcher's view on leader derailment.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, I present my research results using the methodology outlined in Chapter 3. This study employed qualitative data analysis—an inductive thematic approach that relied on coding particular semantics within the data. This approach involves analyzing the explicit content of the data rather than reading into the subtext. This chapter outlines the results of the inductive thematic analysis to bring to light the perspectives and experiences of 22 executive coaches. By exploring this topic of leader derailment, this study supported, validated, and expanded existing findings in the literature, providing a solid foundation for future research. This research utilized the current body of knowledge to develop insightful interview questions, facilitating access to the most up-to-date information available. Furthermore, this study also contributed to the existing research by uncovering the leading derailment factors and discerning why some leaders derail and why some escape derailment patterns.

This study has revealed several nuanced insights into derailment factors, such as the importance, influence, and interplay between personal, situational, and organizational factors in understanding leader derailment. This research also showed that not all leaders suffer derailment, even though they exhibit derailing behaviors. This study's participants, who are executive coaches, have also provided practical recommendations for organizations and leaders to prevent and mitigate such derailment outcomes, ensuring its applicability. The results of this study have important implications for organizations and leaders alike. By understanding the factors that contribute to leader derailment, organizations can take proactive steps to mitigate the risk of losing talented leaders and the negative organizational consequences associated with derailment. Similarly, leaders can seek coaching to proactively develop their own skills and behaviors to reduce their risk of derailment. Overall, this research provides a valuable contribution to the

literature on leader derailment, offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to derailment and identifying why some leaders do not derail, as well as providing nuanced insights on why personal, situational, and organizational factors can derail leaders.

In this chapter, I provide the data that emerged from the qualitative analysis conducted for this study. This data uncovered the underlined themes and subthemes based on the statements of each participant interviewed. It is critical to note that the type of leaders the executive coaches covered and concentrated on were civilian sector leaders. Also, it is essential to remember that this study conceptualizes derailment as a phenomenon where the career trajectory of a promising leader unexpectedly stalls, culminating in stagnation, demotion, or termination. This occurs despite early indications of outstanding potential and success, thereby highlighting a significant disconnect between initial expectations and eventual outcomes, a gap that commands further research and understanding. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate the reasons behind this divergence, focusing on a single, well-defined question. What do executive coaches perceive to be the internal and external factors derailing leaders?

Participant Demographic and Sample Size Data

This study consisted of 22 qualitative interviews with executive coaches who were certified, trained, or employed at the International Coaching Federation (ICF), Hogan Assessments Systems, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder-Centered Coaching, the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC), Kaiser Leadership Solutions, Maxwell Leadership, Chief Executive Alliance LLC, Sound Board Inc., and the Co-Active Training Institute (CTI). In addition, some had their own executive coaching firms. This study's participants were male and female, from various racial backgrounds and coaching enterprises. I conducted each interview, most lasting over an hour each, except for

two that lasted 50 minutes. In total, 14 men and 8 women participated in this leadership research. Each had at least 7 years of professional executive coaching expertise; the median average was 17 years of executive coaching experience. Some had been researchers and coaches since they started their professional careers; some were former corporate U.S. executives; some were psychologists; and others were former chief human resources officers (CHROs).

Introduction to the Results

After a thorough immersion in the data, the analysis uncovered themes and subthemes. This entailed a bottom-up process in which themes emerged directly from the data. The themes that naturally emerged during the analysis came after carefully reading the transcripts multiple times, as well as via audio playbacks. This process helped me to understand the data and underline patterns, phrases, and concepts emerging from the transcripts. As a result, I became familiar with the data through repeated readings and engagement. This helped me generate my initial codes, which I created to label and describe features and patterns in the data. I then grouped these codes as initial themes, which facilitated the emergence of patterns within the transcripts. To ensure accurate capture of the data, I also utilized the Dedoose coding qualitative app in conjunction with spreadsheets and memos. Dedoose is a cloud-based application designed for structuring, grouping, and analyzing research data (Dedoose, n.d.).

These combined tools facilitated the identification of 4 themes and 12 subthemes. For instance, I observed that participants frequently used similar phrases, ideas, and concepts in response to questions about emotional intelligence, organizational dynamics, situational contexts, and personality traits. Consequently, I categorized these responses within their corresponding themes and subthemes. The table below outlines each theme, its associated subthemes, and the percentage of times executive coaches discussed and referred to each theme as a derailing factor.

Table 1*Results of Inductive Thematic Analysis*

Themes	Subthemes	Percentage of Times Underscored Among Participants
Inadequate Emotional Intelligence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Problem of Poor Self-Awareness 2. Emotional Dysregulation: The Unmanaged Self 3. Lacking Social Skills and Empathy: No Quality Relationships 	100%
Dysfunctional Personality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Unaddressed Shadow of the Dark Side and Lacking Coachability 2. Corruptibility and Exhibiting Unethical Behaviors 	77.27%
Poor Polarity Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lacking Diversity of Leadership Styles 2. Lacking Strategic Acumen 3. Struggles in Adapting to Change 	86.36%
Organizational Landmines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Absence of Feedback to Leaders 2. Misalignment Between Leader, Organizational Culture and Structures 3. Office Politics: Unwritten Rules of the Game & Low Idiosyncrasy Credits 4. Abuse and Workplace Bullying 	100%

Themes and Results of Analysis

In the next section, I provide a detailed definition and summary of each theme and subtheme as they emerged and re-emerged during this qualitative study. The themes as stated above are inadequate emotional intelligence, dysfunctional personality, poor polarity management, and organizational landmines. I provide relevant quotes from the transcripts to explain the content and context behind what participants said. These quotes not only bring to light the executive coach's voice but also serve as a strong validation, adding veracity and authenticity to the themes and subthemes. Below are each of the uncovered factors.

Theme 1: Inadequate Emotional Intelligence

During the interview phase of this study, participants were asked what the common indicators or early warning signs of leader derailment were that they had observed from their coaching experience with early to middle-level managers. This study also inquired if the same derailing characteristics persisted at the executive level. According to the transcript, all the executive coaches described low emotional intelligence as the leading derailing factor. Furthermore, most coaches asserted that if derailing behaviors remain unaddressed and unregulated, they persist into later stages of one's career. For example, one of the executive coaches (also a trained psychologist) said: “They [derailers] carry on to the executive level without doubt... You can't really erase the stripes on a zebra” (Participant 2). Another said, “I find that some leaders, whether early, whether they're emerging, whether they are executives, if they don't have a [good] level of emotional intelligence...it can be a derailer” (Participant 10).

In another part of this study, participants were asked about the role of emotional intelligence in leader derailment and which emotional intelligence domain they often found lacking in derailed leadership. The responses from the executive coaches were particularly

insightful, as they identified poor self-awareness, emotional dysregulation, and poor social skills and a lack of empathy as significant derailers. These responses were then carefully analyzed, leading to the creation of subthemes, as detailed in Table 2. These were individually examined in detail.

At large, the theme of inadequate emotional intelligence was assigned to present the findings from the thematic analysis that identified poor self-awareness, emotional dysregulation, poor social skills and lack of empathy as significant derailers. Inadequate emotional intelligence refers to a deficiency or insufficiency in the ability to recognize, understand, and effectively manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. As a result, individuals with inadequate emotional intelligence may struggle to navigate social interactions, regulate their emotions, and make sound decisions based on emotional cues (Côté, 2014; Goleman, 1995). This deficiency can manifest in various ways, such as difficulty expressing emotions appropriately, challenges in building and maintaining relationships, and ineffective coping mechanisms when faced with stress or adversity (Gentry., 2015; Gentry et al., 2007; Mckee et al., 2008).

The executive coaches categorically stated that, due to inadequate emotional intelligence, leaders may struggle to accurately perceive and understand the emotions and needs of others, particularly those of their team. Therefore, they have difficulty understanding or empathizing with others and responding appropriately to emotional cues and situational needs. Participants also mentioned that such leaders equally struggle with managing themselves adequately. For example, in highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence, one executive coach, who also happens to be a psychologist, explained one research project he conducted with several colleagues a couple of years ago. The study was based on engineers and scientists within a research division of a Fortune 100 company. One of their key findings was that these

professionals’ emotional and social intelligence behaviors, as perceived by their peers (not through self-assessment), accounted for one-third of their effectiveness in their roles. Their study revealed that interpersonal skills significantly influence job performance in traditionally technical or individualistic environments. He stated, “We showed that the emotional and social intelligence behavior as seen by their colleagues...predicted 1/3 of their effectiveness; unique variance accounted for 1/3. Huge.” Another coach said, “Yes, [lacking] emotional intelligence is always going to be a big [derailment] factor because when you have a high level of emotional intelligence, it helps you to read people, to know people” (Participant 18).

Overall, the qualitative data analysis from the 22 interviews revealed that participants identified poor self-awareness, emotional dysregulation, poor social skills, and low empathy as common derailers. Further analysis later confirmed that these factors were actually in a hierarchy. Based on data from this study, poor self-awareness was ranked as the most concerning factor, followed by emotional dysregulation, and lastly, poor social skills and low empathy. Those factors were underlined as emotional intelligence deficiencies that often trigger a leader's downfall, and each is explored in detail below. This data is clearly illustrated in Table 1, where the theme of inadequate emotional intelligence was coded and discussed across all 22 transcripts, highlighting its prevalence in the data (100% of participants).

Table 2

Results of Theme 1

Theme 1: Inadequate Emotional Intelligence
Subtheme 1.1: The Problem of Poor Self-Awareness

Subtheme 1.2: Emotional Dysregulation: The Unmanaged Self
Subtheme 1.3: Lacking Social Skills and Empathy: No Quality Relationships

Subtheme 1.1: The Problem of Poor Self-Awareness

The subtheme of poor self-awareness emerged as the most frequently cited and cross-referenced subtheme within the inadequate emotional intelligence theme. Within this subtheme of *poor self-awareness*, I grouped various references in which participants directly referred to poor self-awareness, blind spots, and low self-knowledge and understanding as a derailer. Poor self-awareness refers to an individual's limited understanding and insight into their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Dunning, 2011). It is also about knowing how others perceive oneself (Eurich, 2018). In essence, self-awareness is like a radar or sensor. According to the transcripts from this study, in the context of leadership, the executive coaches presented self-awareness as a critical component that enables leaders to recognize and comprehend their strengths, weaknesses, values, and motivations, as well as how others perceive them. This awareness, they said, empowers leaders to make informed decisions, build quality relationships, and adapt their leadership style to various situations. On the other hand, poor self-awareness represents a lack of insight or understanding about oneself, including one's thoughts, emotions, behaviors, strengths, weaknesses, and knowledge of how others experience one as a leader. Therefore, poor self-awareness is like a broken or lost radar or sensor.

Conversely, participants explained that poor self-awareness is detrimental and has a derailing effect on leaders. All participants stated that having poor self-awareness was an early and common indicator of leader derailment that can affect any leader in the organizational

hierarchy. The 22 executive coaches often placed poor self-awareness as the number one or two common indicators and early warning sign of leader derailment. To substantiate this point, one coach explained:

Most people in leadership and management aren't aware of their dark sides. It goes back to this percentage I was talking about. My guess is easily 80%. What effect does it have? It makes them vulnerable to two things: one, vulnerable to developing what I call a faux self, a self-image that's wrong...[two] it makes them more vulnerable to manipulation by others. (Participant 1)

The quote above suggests that poor self-awareness can cause leaders to have a false sense of self, making them vulnerable to potential manipulation due to a lack of a strong and authentic identity. Thus, as the coach later explained, it can cause them to behave poorly and unwisely.

Several other coaches echoed the same sentiment and conclusion when explaining why leaders derail. They equally stated that poor self-awareness can hinder a leader's ability to understand themselves and their impact on others, resulting in poor interpersonal relationships and a struggle to establish trust and credibility among team members. This lack of self-awareness they said can lead to detrimental behaviors, as one coach pointed out: "When a leader doesn't have enough self-awareness to understand their impact on others... they're surprised to hear that they might be perceived as a bully or that they might be perceived as scattered" (Participant 4). In a similar vein, another coach warned, "If...[leaders] are not aware of what their vulnerabilities are when it comes to derailments, they are likely to exhibit them to their own detriment" (Participant 5). This potential for self-sabotage underscores the importance of self-awareness. Furthermore, another coach explained, "If you don't understand what's bothering you and why it's bothering you so much, then you have no hope of navigating that stress and managing it" (Participant 2). In saying so, the participant underscores the cruciality of knowing oneself.

The other facet highlighted and reemphasized by other coaches was the importance of having the knowledge of how people perceive one as a leader and the problem and inability of some leaders not understanding what is happening around them. One coach emphasized that poor self-awareness often triggers derailing behaviors and shared a story of a leader who reprimanded their team for not performing to his expectations when the company was experiencing a troubling and challenging time due to market factors outside their control. She underscored that the leader's poor self-awareness negatively affected him because he was unable to see and understand what his team was experiencing and feeling. As a result, she criticized a common approach in corporate and organizational settings, in which leaders spend extensive periods lecturing teams on areas for improvement without having a contextual understanding and without fostering genuine engagement with their team. She described this as a significant misstep because it fails to recognize their team's efforts and concerns. She explained that such an approach lacks self-awareness and represents a self-centered, one-way communication flow where leaders merely “talk” without knowing the thoughts and concerns of others. She warned that such an approach is a derailer. She explained:

Tough market, getting up and preaching for an hour about all the things that the team needs to do better, it's a miss... You're not engaging the team. You're not recognizing efforts. You're just talking. You're not answering any questions..., it's [a lack] of social awareness. (Participant 3)

Essentially, she underscored that a lack of social awareness among leaders is indicative of poor self-awareness and explained that it causes an ineffective unidirectional communication style that neglects the perspectives of others and lacks engagement. Consequently, such a mindset causes a leader to remain oblivious and detached from how they are perceived by others, impacting their ability to effectively connect and communicate with their team.

Similarly, another coach stated, “Self-awareness is arguably the most important thing; it's like, how do we show up? I mean, once you've noted the [derailing] behaviors, then you can get to work on them” (Participant 16). Additionally, one other coach stated that, due to a lack of conscious knowledge and understanding of themselves, some leaders have a mindset that is akin to being on autopilot. He explained that such a mindset could be detrimental to the point of derailment. He explained:

What are your unconscious core beliefs? Do you know what they are? What are your unconscious core values? Do you know what they are? Because they influence everything you say and do...If you don't know what those things are, you're operating in what we call autopilot.... And when leaders stay on autopilot constantly all the time, you're going to hit for a crash. (Participant 17)

In summary, this coach and others highlighted the benefits of accurately knowing oneself as a leader. The opposite of self-awareness, as he and others have explained, can result in a false self-image, failure, disengagement, and susceptibility to manipulation.

Subtheme 1.2: Emotional Dysregulation: The Unmanaged Self

Under the subtheme of emotional dysregulation, I grouped references where executive coaches emphasized stress, burnout, emotional outbursts, and a lack of self-control in response to questions about the emotional intelligence competency that derailed leaders lacked. Within the inadequate emotional intelligence theme, participants cited emotional dysregulation as the second most frequently referenced subtheme that caused derailment.

Emotional dysregulation is difficulty managing or controlling one's emotions healthily and appropriately (Gross, 2015). It involves experiencing intense emotions disproportionate to a situation or having difficulty calming down after becoming emotionally aroused (Aldao et al., 2010). As a result, individuals with emotional dysregulation may struggle to modulate their

emotions' intensity, duration, or expression, leading to difficulties in interpersonal relationships at work and their overall well-being (Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2008; Miao et al., 2016).

Emotional dysregulation is like having a broken thermostat. Just as a broken thermostat fails to regulate room temperature properly, individuals with emotional dysregulation struggle to regulate their emotional responses and behaviors. They may experience extreme highs and lows, and they have difficulty maintaining a stable emotional state. To put it another way, consider emotions and behaviors as musical instruments. Some leaders possess the skill and finesse to play their emotional and behavioral instruments, adjusting the volume and tone as necessary. However, a leader with emotional dysregulation may be unable to control the instrument, producing discordant and overwhelming sounds that disrupt the harmony of their life and work.

The executive coaches interviewed shared that they have noticed that the second leading derailment factor is an inability to regulate or manage oneself as a leader. One coach explained why. He discussed the concept of leadership effectiveness and resonance, as well as its connection to personal well-being. He proposed that a critical indicator of an individual's leadership resonance or effectiveness is their ability to maintain healthy habits. Drawing parallels to medical warning signs like forgetfulness as an early indicator of Alzheimer's or dementia, the participant suggests that losing touch and control over one's body as a leader is a precursor to leadership derailment. As such, he likened it to a series of interconnected warning signs, such as forgetting or suspending healthy habits, gaining weight, substance abuse, and sleep disturbances. He explained that addressing these signs proactively can mitigate the risk of leadership derailment. Furthermore, he asserted that disregarding these signs increases the likelihood of derailment. For instance, he explained:

Another measure that's probably equally sensitive to the early stages [of leader

derailment] is losing touch with their own body. So, they literally gain weight. They're drinking too much. They're smoking cigarettes. They're eating fried foods...you start to see them not practicing what we know to be important, healthy behaviors, or they have trouble sleeping. (Participant 1)

In essence, he explains that poor self-regulation in leaders can lead to behaviors that adversely impact their health. This is because a lack of self-control can result in stress-related health issues, impulsive decision-making that can damage professional credibility, and actions that undermine their effectiveness.

Similarly, another coach explained why poor self-regulation is a derailing factor. She underscored the challenges leaders face in coping with heightened and often conflicting demands, leading to increased pressure on their day-to-day responsibilities. She emphasized the importance of self-management skills, suggesting a strong correlation between leaders' ability to manage themselves and their capacity to manage others effectively. So, analogously, imagine a juggler balancing multiple balls of varying sizes and weights. Each ball represents a demand or responsibility placed on the leader. The struggle to cope with pressure arises when more balls are added or when they must juggle balls with conflicting trajectories. This illustrates the importance of self-regulation for leaders to be able to prioritize and organize their tasks, akin to deciding which balls to focus on and how to manage them effectively. However, leaders who lack self-regulation may spend their energies and focus incorrectly, thus draining themselves and exposing themselves to derailing behaviors and outcomes that can significantly hinder their leadership effectiveness. For example, the participant said:

The third area [derailer] I found myself noting was just the struggle to cope with pressure because again, most of the leaders we're coaching have been given heightened demands and sometimes competing demands, which gets to why the need to prioritize, and the struggle to just cope with the additive pressure, if you will, of their day to day...Our ability to manage ourselves is highly correlated, I believe with our ability to manage other people...The same skill set is transferable to managing people. So, if we can't self-

regulate, and do some of what I just described, I think you see all sorts of derailing behavior when it comes to managing other people. (Participant 7).

This statement above highlights the interconnectedness between self-regulation and leadership effectiveness, because it emphasizes the need for leaders to cultivate self-regulation skills to navigate pressure and excel in managing themselves and their teams. Therefore, failure to self-regulate can lead to derailment.

Furthermore, several other participants also noted that a failure to self-regulate properly can have dire consequences. For example, one coach noted, “This is a classic story on the derailment. People [leaders] get too stressed. They don’t realize how stressed they are. They default to the worst side of their personality” (Participant 2). Another emphasized, “If you’re unable to control your emotions at work. It’s going to impact your performance” (Participant 16). Additionally, in addressing the importance of managing stress, a participant explained:

If you don't find a way for you to go back and recoup your energy and replenish your energy and reduce the adrenaline that's affecting your body day in and day out. You're gonna have all kinds of medical problems, mental problems, all kinds of problems. You begin to break down. (Participant 17)

The highlight of what the executive coaches were saying is that for a leader to avoid derailment and enjoy continued progress or success, emotional regulation or self-management is paramount for leader longevity and effectiveness. This is why one participant elucidated that “awesome coping skills require...understanding what saps your energy and what contributes to your energy...and using that can help you set yourself up for the next thing” (Participant 22).

Furthermore, another participant clarified that, despite the expectation of emotional dysregulation in the early years of a leader's career, he has observed that the problem persists beyond that point. He stated that:

Often, earlier in our career, we are less skilled at self-managing in certain situations...So

I would say that actually, yes, [it causes derailment] that's absolutely true...And I note that some senior leaders [referenced]...they struggled the most [with self-regulation]. (Participant 20)

Another coach shared a similar perspective, she said:

So, I have a client, he's actually now a CEO, a guy that I worked with who, early in his career, when he gets stressed, gets hyper-cynical, very reserved, and a little too curt. It leads him to be a bit gossipy. Managing that, that's what got him to the C suite, but now the company is under huge pressure. He's reverted to that same old behavior, and it will undo him. (Participant 2)

In summary, participants consistently highlighted and reinforced the critical importance of self-regulation in preventing derailing behaviors and negative outcomes. They emphasized that the ability to manage oneself effectively is vital at every stage of a leader's career. They espoused that failure to adequately self-regulate can lead to detrimental behaviors that undermine both personal and professional success. This can manifest in various ways, such as bad emotional reactions, poor decision-making, and inability to handle stress, ultimately leading to career stagnation or derailment. The consensus among participants was that self-regulation is a foundational competency for sustaining long-term leadership effectiveness and career progression.

Subtheme 1.3: Lacking Social Skills and Empathy: No Quality Relationships

Under the subtheme of lacking social skills and empathy: no quality relationships, I grouped references in which participants made quotations and mentioned the correlation between leader derailment and not having empathy, quality relationships, and social skills and their importance to leaders. Within the inadequate emotional intelligence bracket, the subtheme of lacking social skills and empathy and having no quality relationships was the third most referenced concept. Based on the thematic analysis of the transcripts, *lacking social skills and*

empathy: no quality relationships refer to a leader's deficiency in their interpersonal abilities to maintain relationships and connections and the capacity to understand and share the feelings of their teams and colleagues, respectively. Leaders who exhibit this deficiency may struggle to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with others due to their inability to effectively communicate, connect, or empathize with others' experiences and emotions (Côté, 2014; Gentry et al., 2007). The challenges of lacking social skills and empathy can be likened to navigating through a social landscape without a map or compass. Metaphorically, without these essential tools, leaders may find it challenging to navigate the complexities of social interactions, resulting in misunderstandings, conflicts, and, ultimately, a deterioration in the quality of relationships. Thus, one cannot overstate the importance of social skills and empathy in leadership. This is why social skills encompass a range of abilities, including effective communication, active listening, conflict resolution, cooperation, and mirroring (Boyatzis et al., 2015; Goleman, 2006). These skills are crucial for building rapport and fostering trust in relationships. Therefore, developing and honing these social competencies is not just critical but a necessary ability that helps leaders to maintain healthy, productive interactions and lead effectively. On the other hand, empathy enables individuals to understand others' perspectives, share their emotions, and respond with compassion and sensitivity, thus strengthening interpersonal bonds (Goleman et al., 2009). Therefore, lacking social skills and empathy can significantly impede a leader's ability to cultivate and maintain quality relationships.

Many participants strongly expressed the importance of social skills and empathy and gave ample references for why lacking social skills and empathy can be problematic for leaders because they impact the quality of the relationships a leader will have. One coach used the core theory of success model, designed by Daniel Kim (2001), to underscore his point and explain

why quality relationships are critical to a leader's success. First, note that the *core theory of success* posits a reciprocal relationship between the quality of relationships, the quality of thinking, the quality of actions, and the quality of results within an organization (Kim, 2001).

This participant explained:

Embedded in there [in leader derailment] is a breakdown in interpersonal relationships. And if people [leaders] don't have the ability either to recognize that or to fix it, then that's a problem but it's implicit in relational management, but people don't necessarily realize that actually the quality of the relationships underpin their success, not the quality of their expertise or intellect. I think the quality of relationships, you know, I'm drawing on a model developed by Daniel Kim called core success theory, which is basically saying, you know, we focus on the quality of our actions and the quality of our results. We don't necessarily appreciate that the quality of our actions requires an appreciation of the quality of our thinking and conversations, which requires an awareness of the quality of our relationships. So on relatively simple levels, or mechanical levels, we can say if we do this, we get this result. But when you get to more complicated, more complex areas, you need to have good thinking. And good thinking requires good relationships. The ability to listen, the ability to ask questions, the ability to encourage the best from the people around you. (Participant 15)

At the heart of what the executive coach emphasized above is that the *core theory of success* revolves around the interconnectedness of actions, thinking, conversations, and quality relationships in achieving success. This theory posits that while it is easy to focus on the quality of actions and results, it is equally important to recognize that the quality of actions is contingent upon the quality of thinking and conversations, which then relies on the quality of relationships. Therefore, fostering high-quality relationships with their team members, colleagues, and stakeholders is essential for any leader. According to the coach quoted, the core theory process will create a virtuous cycle that drives sustainable success and achievement for the leader and their organization. Therefore, understanding and appreciating the quality of relationships is essential for optimizing the quality of thinking and conversations, which ultimately influences the quality of actions and results.

Other coaches echoed similar perspectives about the importance of leaders establishing and sustaining quality relationships through empathy and social skills. For example, one stated, “Losing touch with the people around you is the first sign of leader derailment...Because the quality goes back to my first point, the quality of relationships, and when that starts to slip, everything goes” (Participant 1). This participant suggests that losing touch with the people around oneself is a precursor to leadership derailment. He also explained that maintaining connections with others is a crucial indicator of leadership resonance and effectiveness. Another executive coach stated that there are three aspects of poor emotional intelligence that directly contribute to leader derailment. “A second would be the facet of [lacking] empathy and [an inability] ...to understand other people’s needs, wants, and aspirations” (Participant 5). This is why one coach said it is so crucial to have empathy because it is “our ability to relate to other people and being able to meet people where they are.” (Participant 10).

Many of the coaches continually stressed primarily that empathy and relationship building are fundamental for a leader to be effective long term and thus avoid derailment. As one participant explained, when a leader has empathy and social skills, people go the extra mile for the leader, thus trust and collaboration develop between leaders and those they are leading. She elaborated:

So, I'll call it relationship building from the standpoint of empathy and ability to kind of see the world through others' eyes and shoes, people that they're trying to influence...Because, let's face it, the leaders who gain discretionary effort from people are those who fundamentally care, and part of caring is a degree of empathy for other people. (Participant 7)

In other words, empathy is a critical competency for leaders to have. In addition, another coach highlighted that failure to connect with others and build trusting relationships could hinder communication, collaboration, team building, trust, and the quality of decisions coming out of

the team or department that the said leader is supervising. This is why the coach explained:

Low collaboration...because what happens then is you don't develop a foundation of trust with key stakeholders. And if that doesn't start to mature and your colleagues don't feel a bond between you and them. That further erodes trust and people become isolated. And so...the quality of their decision is not as much, you know, isn't as high as it could be. Their support and social network within the organization and beyond, isn't there. And so, they miss out on opportunities. People don't want to follow them. People don't want them to be on their team. (Participant 6)

The above quotation essentially suggests that leaders who lack quality relationships at work can suffer unfavorable outcomes and consequences due to their poor social skills and empathy. This is why another participant remarked, “Derailers tend to have a lot more to do with the inability to operate in a social network and relational ecosystem” (Participant 12). In other words, this participant emphasizes that leaders who lack interpersonal skills tend to be unable to operate within an organizational setting or climate. Overall, participants stated that leaders can enhance their capacity for organizational success by prioritizing and cultivating solid relationships characterized by empathy, communication, and a desire to collaborate.

Theme 1 Summary

In this theme, participants shared their views on what internal factors contribute to leader derailment. They identified inadequate emotional intelligence as a significant internal reason why some leaders fail. Also, most participants narrowed down primarily on four emotional intelligence incompetencies, where they often noticed an inadequacy or insufficiency in derailed leaders. These were poor self-awareness, emotional dysregulation, poor social skills, and low empathy, which were found to cause interpersonal and intrapersonal issues for leaders.

Moreover, among these four, the majority of participants ranked low self-awareness as being the most significant derailing factor, followed by emotional dysregulation and then a lack of social skills and empathy. These results are derived from each participant based on their practical

observations and experiences with various leaders in different industries.

Theme 2: Dysfunctional Personality

The next theme is dysfunctional personality. This study asked participants during the interviews to explain the effects of an unaddressed shadow self and dark side on a leader's behavior; in turn, participants provided such details and nuanced insights with real-life examples and explanations. First, before highlighting what participants said, it is important to review and understand the shadow and dark side. Carl Jung's analytical psychology serves as the foundation for understanding the concept of the "shadow self" in psychology (Jung, 1959). The shadow self symbolizes the repressed or hidden aspects of a person's personality, often due to their conflict with societal norms or personal ideals (Hollis, 2003). However, the shadow self still surfaces in the daily lives of many. For example, it can show up through projection, passive-aggressive behaviors, and in exaggerated emotional responses when triggered by circumstances. Hence, Jung (1959) stated that the shadow self encompasses socially unacceptable traits and impulses like envy, greed, anger, fearfulness, selfishness, and other instincts and impulses that influence or shape an individual's emotional state and development. He argued that acknowledging, engaging, and integrating the shadow self into one's conscious mind is crucial for managing the shadow side to achieve psychological wholeness and self-realization (Stein, 1998).

Next, Hogan and Hogan (2001) popularized the term "dark side" of personality in leadership studies to conceptualize the unaddressed shadow's impact on leader behavior. Derailment research has explored this concept and has sometimes used the dark side terminology interchangeably with the shadow self. Moreover, this study emphasizes that the "dark side" represents the shadow self's manifestation in behaviors and attitudes that negatively affect oneself and others. Thus, unchecked shadows can manifest as the dark side through uncontrolled

rage, suspiciousness, unconscious biases, unresolved pains, traumas, maladaptive coping mechanisms, and more (Baumeister et al., 1988; Zeigler-Hill & Marcus, 2016). As a result, these manifestations can undermine personal well-being, interpersonal relationships, and professional effectiveness. Furthermore, unmanaged shadows include the propensity towards behaviors that are egotistical, cynical, manipulative, sadistic, antagonistic, self-destructive, and entitled (Furnham et al., 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). In addition, leaders who exhibit excessive competition, paranoia, or participate in relentless power struggles manifest their shadow self through such dark side behaviors. However, according to Jung, the shadow self is not inherently evil but becomes problematic when it is unchecked, ignored, or denied, subsequently leading to subconscious and unconscious actions that can conflict with one's conscious values and goals (Jung, 1959; 1967). As a result, it can create a scenario where a leader may say and do things that perplex and shock those around them and even make the leader dumbfounded about their own actions. Thus, it causes a dissonance; moments when one might feel different from who they know themselves to be.

Moreover, as stated above, it is important to note that the shadow self is not inherently bad or destructive. In fact, various scholars and practitioners have examined the shadow side to show its potential for positivity and workplace success (Furnham, 2017; Furnham et al., 2012). For instance, Zweig and Abrams (1991), in their work "Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature," delved into the process of acknowledging and integrating the shadow self to harness its energy in positive ways instead of allowing it to manifest as the dark side through destructive behaviors. This approach does not involve acting out shadow impulses; rather, it involves understanding their origin and transforming their energy into authentic, positive channels. As a result, the potential for such transformation is not only

theoretical but also a practical reality that can be harnessed for personal growth and leadership development. For instance, one can redirect aggression into assertiveness and harness selfishness for healthy self-care practices or the embrace of self-compassion.

Furthermore, when this study's data was reviewed thematically, participants shared various intriguing insights about the shadow self and dark side. Each was grouped and then analyzed, and the result substantially revealed the problem of dysfunctional leader qualities, which manifests as poor leader behaviors (dark side behaviors) due to an unchecked or unregulated shadow self. Consequently, I refer to this theme as dysfunctional personality.

This study defines dysfunctional personality as a subclinical defect, characterized by subtle and transient mental or emotional setbacks that, while not always blatantly evident or severe enough to meet the diagnostic criteria for a disorder, can nonetheless be significant enough to potentially cause a negative impact on a leader's professional life and interpersonal relationships (Spain, 2019; Wu & LeBreton, 2011). Also, a subclinical dysfunctional personality is the midpoint between a normal and a clinically diagnosed pathological personality (Spain et al., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to understand and reiterate that this study affirms that a dysfunctional personality can be traced to a dark side (unaddressed shadow self). This construct is a result of unhealed and unresolved pains, wounds, and other strange circumstances that shape a leader's experiences and personality. As a result, the unregulated and unhealed shadow self tends to manifest as personality flaws in traits such as narcissism, antagonism, suspiciousness, entitlement, rebellion, retaliatory jealousy, toxicity, and other maladaptive behaviors. Therefore, it is noteworthy for leaders and those who study leadership to understand the effects of the unchecked shadow side, because this study's data shows that it can lead to the exhibition of subclinical personality dysfunction and the display of maladaptive and poor tendencies, such as a

lack of empathy, heavy focus on self-interest, a superiority complex, and a blatant disregard for ethical standards. Consequently, this research and other studies have shown that such behaviors and patterns tend to be disruptive and counterproductive to organizations and workplace success (Babiak & Hare, 2019; Harms, 2017).

Consequently, many participants stated that an unaddressed or unregulated shadow and dark side can certainly trigger derailing behaviors, leading to serious consequences. However, participants did not agree on whether leaders are oblivious to their dark sides or if they recognize them but choose not to confront them. Moreover, this study's data showed that they agreed that having a dark side or not regulating one's shadow self can significantly and negatively impact a leader's performance, potentially causing harm to the leader and their organization. As one coach said, "If you're blind to your dark side, you're going to end up being not just an ineffective leader but a real jerk" (Participant 1). In addition, participants explained other facets of behaviors that mirrored dysfunctional personalities, which they said can detrimentally impact leadership success, effectiveness, and development. Therefore, this study used dysfunctional personality as a theme to represent the terms participants used. Participants used terms like narcissism, manipulation, rebellion, lack of coachability, corruption, and disregard for ethical norms to represent dysfunctional leader traits. Consequently, I clustered the theme of dysfunctional personality into two subthemes: (1) *the unaddressed shadow of the dark side and lacking coachability*, and (2) *corruptibility and exhibiting unethical behaviors*. Those two subthemes emerged from the data and were highlighted and examined as subthemes. Table 1 outlines the percentage of coding and discussion of dysfunctional personality across 17 transcripts, which accounted for 77.27% of participants.

Table 3

Results of Theme 2

Theme 2: Dysfunctional Personality
Subtheme 2.1: The Unaddressed Shadow of the Dark Side and Lacking Coachability
Subtheme 2.2: Corruptibility and Exhibiting Unethical Behaviors

Subtheme 2:1: The Unaddressed Shadow of the Dark Side and Lacking Coachability

In this subtheme, the unaddressed shadow of the dark side and lack of coachability represents the unfavorable aspects of a leader’s personality that they may ignore, deny, suppress or repress. It consists of qualities, emotions, desires, and impulses that are not socially unacceptable and are incompatible with leadership. It encompasses personality traits and tendencies that are counterproductive to team functions and includes qualities such as excessive selfishness, deceit, spite, rage, and self-sabotaging behaviors (Furnham et al., 2013; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985; Hogan & Hogan, 2001). An example is an executive who presents a charismatic and charming facade to colleagues and clients but engages in unethical practices behind closed doors and exhibits their dark side, betraying trust and integrity for personal gain. Therefore, the dark side can also be compared to weeds in a garden, symbolizing negative traits that, if left unchecked, can overshadow and choke out the positive qualities. Likewise, the shadow side can be compared to a person who prides themselves on being kind and compassionate yet harbors feelings of anger or envy. These poor, repressed, concealed, and unaddressed emotions constitute their shadow or dark side, which, when left unmanaged, can

influence leader behavior counterproductively in blatant, subtle, or passive-aggressive ways (Schmidt et al., 2014; Widiger & Simonsen, 2005).

Furthermore, this study's coding has brought to light a range of dark side behaviors, such as narcissism, fraudulence, manipulateness, cunning-exploitativeness, vindictiveness, casting aspersions, rebellion, rejecting accountability, and disregard for ethical standards. These are the very behaviors that executive coaches often refer to when identifying dysfunctional leader behaviors. Moreover, this study has also identified lacking coachability as a significant component of the unregulated shadow self or dark side, a point that participants have emphasized. This study defines *coachability* as the ability to listen, the humility to keep one's ego in check, the capacity to learn, and the courage to apply what one has learned. Conversely, lacking coachability means being resistant to feedback, unwilling to learn or improve, and unable to accept constructive criticism or guidance.

This study has found that lacking coachability is a serious problem for leaders. It is the reason one coach mentioned that lacking coachability is problematic and a symptom of the dark side. To illustrate this point, one example a coach gave, described a leader who was rebellious and sought to be the center of attention during team meetings, thereby displaying excessive self-centeredness and hurting team functions. This behavior not only affected team morale and growth but also had a profound negative impact on the leader himself. The participant explained:

His dark side is he has this identity as a rebel. And I don't think he fully understands how it affects him as a leader, as a businessperson. It led to him being unable to sell his company...he had to leave the company and get a full-time job because he had financial needs...team building was all about him [selfishly] playing his instrument and his music. (Participant 3)

To elucidate the quote above, the participant explained that the referenced leader was unable to function productively, and his rebellious ego hindered team building, ultimately leading to his

downfall. His narcissistic and rebellious traits prevented anyone from wanting to work with his company or purchase it when he put it up for sale. Furthermore, the same coach recounted another story about a leader she knew who exhibited dysfunctional characteristics. She explained that this leader took it upon herself to manipulate people in an attempt to gain control by seeking pity. She describes this leader as someone who exhibits manipulative behavior, particularly in her interactions with colleagues. The participant illustrated this leader's manipulation by demonstrating her ability to elicit sympathy by feigning emotions like crying, which she uses as a tool to exert control over others. She explained:

She's manipulative. She's not a bad person, but she is manipulative. I've seen her, seen this... [female leader] cry on the spot herself to gain pity from women. It's a manipulative behavior. But like I was saying for her, her dark side might be that she likes to be in charge [through manipulation]. She likes to control people. (Participant 3)

In addition, another coach expressed his belief that stress is the primary trigger for a leader's dysfunctional qualities. However, he clarified that some leaders still exhibit blatant dysfunctionality even in the absence of stress. For instance, he stated that, "I think you can see signs of a leader's derailing dysfunctionality, right even when they're not under stress" (Participant 5). Another participant explained that some leaders exhibit dysfunctional traits as a result of a lack of confidence or due to an overinflated ego. This coach remarked that, "I think we have a lot of narcissistic executives out there who have tremendously low self-esteem" (Participant 21). Another participant explained, "Common [derailing] factors that kind of stand out to me. One of the things is the way that their approach is all about them. Me, me, me" (Participant 13). Also, another participant brought up the point that "especially at the highest level of high-ranking leaders, we already have some leaders who have been known in the newspaper to just be belligerent. And that is the dark side" (Participant 10). Moreover, while

acknowledging the problem of dysfunctional personality flaws in some leaders, one coach said that although some leaders might be aware of their shadow or dark side, they nonetheless do not know how to address it, thereby allowing it to determine their emotional states. “I think they [leaders] don’t know how to deal with their dark side” (Participant 19).

Additionally, when asked about the effect of a leader’s dysfunctional personality, various participants raised the fact that failure to understand and address their shadow or dark side can expose leaders to derailment risks and various consequences, such as losing their jobs and being sidetracked. One participant stated, “I would say to you that it’s one of the primary reasons they probably lose their jobs” (Participant 16). Another executive coach recounted the story of a leader with a dysfunctional personality who was recommended to him for coaching. He explained that this leader’s egoistic and maladaptive behaviors cost him reputationally and led to his ineffectiveness and stagnation at work. He explained:

I started working with a gentleman who has super high intellectual capability...So a lot of times, he is the smartest person in the room...he connects the dots quicker than most of his colleagues do...And yet he was largely ineffective at influencing them...Which then created a whole bunch of bad behaviors...Outside of meetings, he told false stories about his colleagues...He broke agreements that were made in the room...because he didn't get his way...And he was seen by his colleagues as someday who was arrogant, untrustworthy, and dishonest...he reaction to disagreement was, you are disrespecting me. (Participant 8)

The quote above highlights the challenges of having a dysfunctional personality as a leader, and how it can hinder a leader's ability to collaborate and persuade colleagues. Conversely, in describing the seriousness and severity of not addressing the shadow or dark side, one participant explained that when he is coaching clients and discovers that the issue at hand has a deep underlying personality-related problem, he sometimes has to advise the coachee (client) to either go for therapy or see a psychiatrist. He explained:

Look, we're this big bag of emotions running around. You know what you do with them [emotions] at work is important... Sometimes, [inability to control it] it's neurological and more related to therapeutic reasons. And sometimes I have referred a huge percentage of my clients to see a therapist or a psychiatrist. And that's actually where I draw the line. (Participant 16)

Essentially, participant 16 emphasizes emotion's significant impact on a leader's professional life, likening it to "big bags of emotions". This vivid metaphor underscores the complexity of one's emotional state and experiences and how they influence workplace behavior. The participant also acknowledged that managing these emotions is crucial, as their influence can profoundly affect workplace dynamics and personal well-being. However, regulating these emotions can be immensely challenging for some leaders. As the coach stated, for some leaders the challenge may stem from underlying neurological or psychological issues requiring professional intervention. Recognizing this, the executive coach frequently refers clients to therapists or psychiatrists when their emotional difficulties exceed the scope of executive coaching. This referral practice highlights the evidence of chronic emotional and mental problems that some leaders suffer from and the boundary between coaching and psychotherapy, indicating that while coaches can support emotional management, there are instances where specialized therapeutic or psychiatric expertise is necessary.

Subsequently, when participants were asked if there was a correlation between leader derailment and lacking coachability, most affirmed that they believed there was a correlation. Lacking coachability refers to an individual's unwillingness, resistance, or inability to accept correction, feedback, and guidance from a coach, mentor, or colleague (Theeboom et al., 2014; Wilde, 2022). It manifests as an unwillingness or difficulty in implementing suggested changes, incorporating feedback, or actively participating in any coaching or development process (De Meuse et al., 2009; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; London & Smither, 2002). The executive coaches

noted that it is essential for leaders to have a desire to change and not be in denial in order to develop and benefit from coaching and development programs. According to them, lacking coachability or an unwillingness to change and grow could make leaders stagnant or demoted if their developmental areas are not addressed. When asked about the correlation between leader derailment and lacking coachability, a participant said, “I’ll tell you what my answer is... I don’t think that you can coach a narcissist” (Participant 4). Another echoed a similar sentiment: “I would definitely predict, if a person isn’t coachable, they are more prone to derail” (Participant 12). One participant explained why she thought derailment was linked to lacking coachability. She said a notable concern arises when leaders are reluctant to engage with data about their ineffectiveness or poor personal characteristics. Whether it be through psychometric assessments, 360-degree feedback evaluations, or other established assessment models, their refusal to acknowledge or consider such information poses a significant red flag that often results in a lack of coachability, leading to derailment. She explained:

A leader who is unwilling to be shown data about their ineffectiveness or their characteristics. Again, you can do psychometrics, you can do just 360s...you know, there's different models of how you can do this. But if they just outwardly reject it and can't see useful information in there; and they spend the whole time defending themselves. Then they're not open and they're not open to being coached. Then yes, absolutely, it's a derailing behavior ...So the willingness to be part of that process to be a bit vulnerable and accountable is really important for leaders. (Participant 3)

Additionally, another coach used a sports analogy to illustrate the correlation between coachability and leadership success, highlighting the crucial role of coachability in preventing derailment. For instance, consider this: “You know, people talk about Tom Brady. Is he the greatest quarterback of all time? Well, I’ll say this. His numbers speak for themselves...And all his coaches said he was eminently coachable” (Participant 14). Essentially, what he was conveying is that being coachable is key to a leader's career progress and stability. As another

participant explained, coachability is critical for leadership growth. Without it, a leader's performance and organization risk being negatively impacted by the leader's failure and stagnation. The coach stated, "If you're not coachable, you can't grow and develop as a leader; you're going to stifle, and not knowing you are stifled, you will stifle your organization. And they won't grow" (Participant 17).

Overall, the executive coaches principally pointed out that arrogance and close-mindedness prevent coachability and limit a leader's growth and learning. As a result, such poor traits make it difficult for leaders to grow in self-awareness, capability building, and interpersonal understanding. For example, one participant stated, "Those [leaders] who lack openness to learn, or they lack the desire for anyone to correct their thinking or to challenge them around their thinking... that's where you're more in line towards derailment" (Participant 21).

In summary, coaches underscored the effect of the shadow and dark side on leader behavior. They also stated that when leaders are unable or unwilling to confront and address areas of concern highlighted by coaches or feedback mechanisms, they risk perpetuating detrimental patterns of behavior that may ultimately lead to derailment. As a result, by shutting themselves off from the possibility of coaching to address identified issues, leaders lacking a coachable mindset further entrench themselves in maladaptive behaviors. Consequently, they risk stagnation, demotion, or termination, thereby impeding their own professional growth and potentially jeopardizing their organization's progress.

Subtheme 2.2: Corruptibility and Exhibiting Unethical Behaviors

In this subtheme of corruptibility and exhibiting unethical behaviors, I have once again relied on the valuable insights of the participants. Their responses were instrumental in

identifying distinct derailing characteristics, such as susceptibility to corruption and deliberate violations of ethical standards. The subtheme of corruptibility and exhibiting unethical behaviors refers to one's vulnerability, openness, or tendency to be influenced or compromised in a morally or ethically negative way. It is the opposite of integrity and denotes a propensity to engage in dishonest, fraudulent, or unethical practices, often for personal gain or benefit (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Palanski & Yammarino, 2009; Williams, 2021a). Unethical behaviors consist of actions or decisions that violate moral principles, values, and professional or socially acceptable standards of conduct (Treviño et al., 2006). These behaviors can involve actions that are considered deceptive and harmful to others (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). Examples of unethical leadership behaviors include lying, cheating, stealing, fraud, harassment, and exploitation (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2005).

Based on the thematic analysis of the interviews, the problem of corruptibility and exhibiting unethical behaviors emerged clearly. When discussing the other factors contributing to leader derailment, some participants mentioned unethical behavior and corruption. While not many participants identified unethical behavior and corruption as the primary cause of derailment, they did acknowledge it as a contributing factor. As a result, those participants linked derailing behaviors to leaders abandoning or flouting ethical standards. Some described it as embracing a willingness to take advantage of and capitalize on resources illegally or unethically. Others said it was about simply ignoring ethics and morals. For example, one participant explained that bribery, using company funds for personal legacy projects, and greed are examples of derailing behaviors she has witnessed. Here is an excerpt of what she said:

What are other [derailment] risk factors? It's always corruptibility or fraud. And this is not always driven by pure greedy motivations. But sometimes it's driven by real financial needs and a poor business sense. So, I'll give you a really good example: a functioning

engineering firm, husband and wife together, power couple...really built this firm up and got completely derailed by their legacy project.....[they] started taking the money from the firm and putting it into the school that they were trying to run...that is the ability for you to be corrupted. (Participant 3)

In discussing derailment risk factors, Participant 3 highlighted corruptibility and fraud as significant issues that derail leaders. She notes that these risks are not always motivated purely by greed but can stem from genuine financial needs and poor business acumen. She recounts the story of a successful engineering firm led by a husband-and-wife team. This "power couple" built their firm from the ground up but became derailed by their commitment to a legacy project. They diverted funds from their profitable business into a school they were trying to establish, which ultimately compromised the integrity and financial stability of their firm. This example illustrates how personal projects and financial mismanagement can lead to ethical compromises, demonstrating how even well-intentioned leaders can become susceptible to corruption under certain pressures or conditions.

Furthermore, about how corruption and violating ethical standards can lead to derailment, two coaches highlighted workplace affairs with subordinates or having extramarital relationships as reasons why some leaders derail. For instance, one said, "Executives get fired for three primary reasons: one, they get caught doing some impropriety, you're screwing the secretary, or something like that. I mean, ethical sorts of things" (Participant 14). Another said that if a leader sees that they have a tendency or urge to flout rules, norms, and ethical standards regarding workplace relationship policies, like fraternization, they should do something about it; otherwise, they risk derailment. The participant stated explicitly, "So you have to actively take corrective action; otherwise, the weaknesses will remain there, or worse, they can actually lead to a downfall" (Participant 18).

Additionally, one participant, who held the significant role of head of human resources, shared his experience with leaders displaying threatful and unethical conduct. He said that in his prior three decades of corporate experience, particularly during his tenure, he observed and heard of unethical and distressing instances. The severity of these incidents was such that some leaders within the organization made threats of violence. It is exemplified by statements like, “You better shape up, or I’m going to kill you” (Participant 12). However, the interpretation of such a statement remained ambiguous, leaving uncertainty as to whether the threat was literal, implying physical harm, or metaphorical, suggesting an intent to ruin another person’s career. Nonetheless, according to the participant, this encounter was characteristic of unethical and unprofessional behavior, leading to the said leader’s termination. “That senior executive was terminated; we ultimately fired him” (Participant 12).

Theme 2 Summary

In this theme, participants shared their views on another internal derailing factor: dysfunctional personality. They explained how it can lead to derailment. Within the dysfunctional personality component, this study specifically highlighted two factors that contribute to leader derailment: (1) the unaddressed shadow of the dark side and a lack of coachability; and (2) corruptibility and exhibiting unethical behaviors. The terms and behaviors coaches pointed out to describe a dysfunctional leader's personality included narcissism, manipulateness, dismissiveness, rebellion, rejecting accountability, ethical misconduct, casting aspersions on people, and lacking coachability. They noted that these behaviors and traits have led leaders they know personally, or by observation, to failure and derailment.

Theme 3: Poor Polarity Management

In the interviews, participants were also asked to explain the significance of being versatile as a leader and the dangers of not being versatile. Most participants shared that leaders lacking various leadership styles and diverse operating methods can suffer derailment. Participants explained that when a leader is not versatile, it often leads to potential pitfalls, like the oversaturation of strengths (overusing strengths) and lopsided leadership (unbalanced leadership). Participants equally expressed that lacking the ability to manage competing necessities is also a derailer, thus highlighting a failure to have a balanced leadership approach. This study defines a balanced leadership approach (or philosophy) as *centripetal leadership*, an approach that integrates diverse and peripheral ideas, styles, and values into a cohesive whole. This approach encourages accurate holistic assessments, refined leadership techniques, and continuous balancing by managing polarities and avoiding extremes, thereby embodying the principle of the golden mean. Therefore, the theme of *poor polarity management* was used to describe the absence of such a balanced approach to leadership. Thus, in order to understand poor polarity management, one must first understand polarity management.

Polarity management in leadership is a strategic approach that recognizes and leverages interdependent and opposing forces (polarities) that exist in complex situations (Johnson, 1992). It requires a both-and mindset to effectively embrace, manage, and balance contradictory forces (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Smith & Kelly, 2002). Therefore, unlike straightforward and traditional problem-solving methods that may not always resolve specific dilemmas or tensions, polarities are managed rather than solved (Johnson, 2020). Examples of polarities include stability versus change, focusing on tasks versus relationships, prioritizing tactics or strategy, embracing centralization or decentralization, and coaching versus directing. This approach is about finding a balance between competing ideas, priorities, or values instead of excluding one

over the other. Thus, polarity management is about identifying and leveraging both poles' inherent strengths and benefits while mitigating the negative consequences of overemphasizing, overusing, or underusing one pole at the expense of the other.

This study has found that overusing one pole at the expense of the other is a derailment. One executive coach explained the symptoms of the problem: “[Derailment] is when we over-rely on and revert to what we know and do best; it is losing the ability to zoom out or take stock of what’s needed to adapt our own and others’ time and resources accordingly” (Participant 7). In other words, it is when a leader over-relies on a particular competency or pole without taking time to examine the situation and realize what is needed. It is a failure to recognize the need of the moment. As a result, her insights reveal the critical importance of polarity management in leadership. In addition, another coach offered more insights:

So, we tend to think of project management as a strength, but if we take it too far or use it at the wrong time, it can be a weakness. We have the ability to understand others, but if we’re not making decisions because you’re so busy understanding everybody, that can be a weakness. (Participant 9)

However, with polarity management, leaders can navigate their workload's changing and competing demands with greater openness, balance, and understanding. Consequently, such an ability enables leaders to have a both-and mindset that contrasts with an either/or mindset, which tends to view challenges as binary problems requiring one definitive approach. Moreover, by embracing polarities, a leader can simultaneously have multiple perspectives, leading to more balanced and adaptable leadership and decision-making processes.

On the other hand, this study defines poor polarity management as the ineffective handling of competing forces and necessities, known as polarities. It occurs when leaders fail to recognize, understand, and embrace the dynamic tensions between competing ideas, styles, or

values. According to Kaiser and Overfield (2011), when leaders lack such understanding, it leads to lopsided leadership and effectiveness (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003, 2009). As a result, it leads to diminished performance, inefficiency, overuse of strengths, and imbalance. For example, a leader over prioritizing short-term profitability over long-term sustainability may jeopardize the organization's future viability and reputation. Alternatively, in the context of innovation and creativity, a leader may under prioritize experimentation over standardization and the status quo. These examples illustrate the concept of poor polarity management, where one pole is seen as more essential than the other. Moreover, with polarity management, their intrinsic benefits are harnessed and integrated without excluding the other.

The executive coaches espoused that leader effectiveness is an ability to manage valid-competing necessities and a function of their versatility. Table 1 outlines the coded and discussed theme of poor polarity management across 19 transcripts, accounting for 86.36% of the participant views. The data analyzed was then placed into three subthemes: (1) *lacking diversity of leadership styles*; (2) *low strategic acumen*; and (3) *struggles in adapting to change*.

Table 4

Results of Theme 3

Theme 3: Poor Polarity Management
Subtheme 3.1: Lacking Diversity of Leadership Styles
Subtheme 3.2: Low Strategic Acumen
Subtheme 3.3: Struggles in Adapting to Change

Subtheme 3.1: Lacking Diversity of Leadership Styles

Participants shared their experiences, knowledge, and even research on the importance of having a versatile leadership style, as well as the problems that arise from a lack of versatility. The majority of executive coaches said leaders need multiple leadership styles and the ability to not overuse their strengths. Within the subtheme of lacking diversity of leadership styles, I clustered references whenever participants underscored the need or absence of diverse leadership styles and the significant dangers of lacking it. This subtheme was one of the most referenced and cross-referenced areas of this study's interviews.

The inductive data analysis led to the clustering of overused strengths, lopsided leadership, and a lack of versatile leadership styles. Also included in the clusters were indicators describing why and when executive coaches thought leaders began overusing their strengths to the point that those strengths become weaknesses. In explaining the importance of having versatility in leadership and avoiding overusing one's strengths as a leader, one participant stated, "Without diversity of thought, you don't have innovation or adaptation" (Participant 1). Another coach explained:

The derailers are always overusing the positives...And one bucket has to do with style...And when you overdo those and you don't start to attune to how that is impacting the people around you, you're set up for a disaster... You overdo some qualities that are wonderful, and they make people react less positively to you. (Participant 2)

Essentially, participant 2 underlined the fact that derailment often results from overusing strengths. That when leaders overdo certain positive qualities without adjusting to the impact on those around them, it can lead to negative reactions and eventual disaster. This is because excessive use of even beneficial leadership styles can cause people to respond less favorably, highlighting the importance of balance and awareness in leadership.

Other participants expressed similar sentiments and thoughts, stressing the importance of avoiding unforced errors by having a repertoire of leadership skills. They explained that over-relying on one particular leadership strength and style can lead to such errors. For instance, one participant said, “It’s essential to have different leadership styles...between the organizational context and the different people you are managing” (Participant 3). While another explained:

Every leader needs to be able to read the scenario. Clarify and identify what kind of leadership is needed in that scenario and operate according to [it]...diverse model versus a one size fits all. So it's, to me, one of the most differentiating leadership capabilities is to have that ability to demonstrate versatility...how do we take good to great? Well, that's by being a versatile leader and adjusting my leadership style to achieve higher levels of performance. (Participant 12)

The quote above emphasizes the importance of adaptability in leadership. He explains that a leader must be able to read each situation, determine the type of leadership required, and adjust their approach accordingly. Rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all model, successful leaders demonstrate versatility by tailoring their leadership style to the needs of the moment. This adaptability is seen as a critical capability that distinguishes effective leaders and enables them to elevate performance from good to great. The ability to adjust one's leadership style to suit various scenarios is crucial for achieving higher levels of success.

Furthermore, another coach went further in explaining the essential components of why leaders need to be versatile and why they need to manage competing demands and equally important values. Keep in mind that this participant had conducted research on versatile leaders and non-versatile leadership approaches and shared his findings during the interview. He expounded:

I got data that shows over half of executive effectiveness is a function of versatility. Can you go to the hoop with your right and your left hand. Whether it's forceful or enabling; strategic, or operational; the more balanced you're on those two

dualities can explain over half of what it means to be an effective executive. (Participant 14)

In other words, having the capacity to manage dualities and polarities is a function of effective leadership. It is the ability to meet the demands of the situation and moment with the appropriate skill or competency. Additionally, another participant used a cliché to describe the lack of versatile leadership styles and skills when explaining reasons for leader derailment, comparing it to having a hammer as a weapon, seeing everything after that as a nail, and forgetting the context and purpose of use. He explained that such an ineffective approach to leadership tends to happen when there is “an inability or a lack of willingness to recognize that different approaches are required” (Participant 15). As a result, participants explained that some leaders derail due to their inability to recognize that a different approach and mindset are required for different situations. Consequently, they may suffer stagnation, demotion, or termination.

Furthermore, when explaining the importance of having a diversity of thought and style as a leader, one coach used a car gear metaphor to explain the cruciality of her point. She said:

The way I talk about it is to talk about range. Like how much range you have as a leader. Like how many gears do you have? Do you have one gear called pacesetting? Just boom, boom, boom, boom, get stuff done, right? Or do you have one gear called coaching, where that's all you're doing? But when the times get tough you don't know how to switch to pacesetting. So I think of it as like a range of gears. And I think it's really important for leaders to know what gear I need to use right now... We have a lot of pacesetting leaders out there. And they burn out an organization. They burn out people around them. So pacesetting leaders have this ripple effect of really burning people out. They get a lot done, but people are very burned out. And that's a huge cost, organizationally. And so, thinking about well, if I'm a pace setting leader, and that's my natural gear, then I need to have another couple of gears that are the opposite. The democratic leader, coaching leader [for example]. (Participant 4)

Here, participant 4 uses the metaphor of gears to describe the range of leadership styles a leader should consider developing. She explained that a leader should not be stuck in a single mode, like pacesetting, which involves a relentless focus on getting things done and can lead to burnout

among teams and organizations. Instead, she advocates for embracing different leadership styles. She explained that effective leaders should be able to switch between different styles, such as coaching or democratic leadership, depending on the situation. This adaptability helps prevent burnout, adopts a balanced approach to leadership, and ensures leaders respond appropriately to various challenges. Another coach explained further:

If you lack a versatility of styles, that's the derailer because if you have only one style as a leader, you're going to find context where it doesn't work. It's not one or the other, either you're versatile in your approach or you're not and if you're not, I think that's the derailer. (Participant 15)

Overall, most participants during the interviews essentially highlighted the intricacies and benefits of having a versatile and interchangeable leadership style, as well as the dangers of not having versatility, which they linked to potential derailment. They also emphasized the importance of managing two competing necessities. Some participants explained that the most versatile leaders could apply the correct leadership style depending on the situation to achieve better performances, enjoy the benefits of avoiding a stagnant and repetitive approach, and leverage the best out of their teams to meet organizational demands. Accordingly, this is why one participant said, “You have to know who you’re talking to. Who you’re dealing with, knowing your audience, and then you apply the appropriate leadership style to get the most out of the individual” (Participant 16). Another coach provided a more detailed explanation. She said:

You ask about the different styles used for managing, leading teams...but the truth of the matter is we use all of those if you're a well-rounded leader, because different situations require different kinds of engagements, and different kinds of leadership and being agile, in that way it allows you to be the best leader you can possibly be...but any of those [leadership] styles that you choose to use to excess can become a fault, depending on the situation. So it's like any strength that you use too often or used inappropriately, even when you're good at it can be a detriment. (Participant 19)

Furthermore, when participants were asked about why and when leaders tend to overly rely on a particular strength or style to the point of it becoming a weakness, they gave insightful reasons as to why a leader will overuse a strength to the point of counterproductivity. One participant stated that this occurs “when they cocoon, when they believe their reviews, or when they surround themselves with people who are sucking up to them.” Another participant said, “I would say probably at transitions.” While one coach simply said, “When they are egoistic” (Participant 18). Moreover, one participant, a former corporate executive, stated that pressure, boredom, loneliness, and a lack of ideas are the main reasons for the use of leadership styles. He explained:

I would say [when they are] under pressure. When you have leaders who are very goal directed, they want to advance, they want to contribute. They're under pressure...they fear that if they don't get this right, exactly, right: I'm gonna fall behind and they overuse their strengths. You know, sometimes leaders derail and overuse strengths when they're bored... Or [when] they feel alone. They've run out of ideas. And they're just going to rely on what they know they've been good at or what they know they've done in the past. (Participant 11)

Lastly, one coach said uncertainty and stress are the main reasons for why leaders overindulge on their strengths. He elucidated:

It's uncertainty and stress [that causes leaders to overuse their strengths] ...pending on what those strengths are, you know, if somebody has a particular worry about being shamed as an example, and they may have perfectionist tendencies, for whatever reason. They may decide to over rely on their detail-orientation when getting ready to make presentations to the Board of Directors. (Participant 8)

In discussing this subtheme, participants emphasized that ineffective polarity management, such as over relying on one's strengths—whether stylistic or skill-based—can be a significant derailing factor. Leaders often fall into the trap of excessively applying their preferred approaches without considering the situational demands, which can lead to negative consequences. This overuse not only hampers their flexibility but also diminishes their

effectiveness and can result in adverse outcomes for the organization. Therefore, it is crucial for leaders to be aware of the potential drawbacks of overusing their strengths and to strive for a balanced approach that adapts to varying contexts and needs.

Subtheme 3.2: Low Strategic Acumen

When asked about the dangers and consequences of leaders overusing their strengths, some participants attributed it to a lack of strategic acumen. This subtheme, *low strategic acumen*, was created to explain their reasoning. Their insights and perspectives, all clustered within this subtheme, emphasize the importance of the issue. First, strategic acumen is a range of leadership abilities, including problem-solving, decision-making, acuity, and visioning, all of which are essential for effective leadership (Mintzberg, 1994). Therefore, leaders with low strategic acumen may lack the necessary insight, foresight, and critical thinking skills required to develop and execute long-term plans, anticipate future challenges, and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Also, leaders with low strategic acumen may struggle to grasp the interconnectedness of various factors shaping an organization's strategic direction, resulting in short-sighted decisions and suboptimal outcomes (Cunningham & Harney, 2012; Whittington, 2001). This study presents low strategic acumen as a deficiency in the ability to effectively comprehend, analyze, and implement an overarching plan to achieve long-term goals. It entails an inability to set objectives for determining a team's or organization's direction.

I grouped references whenever participants mentioned having difficulty or absence of an enterprise point of view, an inability to think strategically, and being too tactically or technically focused. The executive coaches stated that it is vital for leaders to be strategic because it equips them with the ability to think ahead and have a system understanding rather than a narrow-

minded understanding. For example, one participant said, “Strategy. That’s your job as a leader: set the direction of the organization and then inspire them to go in that direction” (Participant 17). Other participants explained that without a strategy, leaders cannot set the right tone for others to follow, nor will they understand the importance of setting the right tone for others to follow. One participant explained, “So here’s the thing... Everything rises and falls on leadership. So the leader is the one who sets the tone” (Participant 18). Another coach metaphorized strategic leadership to explain its significance; she expounded:

It's [like] about being an orchestra director. You're not playing the trumpet. You're not playing the violins, but you have to know what it's like to do all of that. So that you can say, you know, violins I need you to come down here so that the trumpet can be accentuated right? And so you're more like an orchestra director than you are a person who has control over everything...And you are simply, guiding and directing.
(Participant 9)

Essentially, participant 9 compared strategic leadership to the role of an orchestra director, highlighting its significance. She explained that just like an orchestra director doesn't play each instrument, a strategic leader doesn't handle every task directly. Instead, the leader must understand the nuances of each role to guide and direct the team effectively. For instance, knowing when to ask the violins to play softly so the trumpets can stand out. This metaphor emphasizes that strategic leadership is about coordination and direction, rather than control over every detail.

When asked about an example of leader derailment they had observed, a participant shared an example of a leader they knew who was stagnating within her organization. Why was this leader experiencing stagnation? She explained, “She was not taking that enterprise-wide view or that big strategic picture” (Participant 2). Another participant said that not understanding one’s organization systematically and strategically can be problematic and could lead to

derailment. She said, “I think it [derailment] happens because they’re not navigating the system effectively... they’re not thinking about their organization as a system” (Participant 4).

Furthermore, another participant stated that “in a lot of the executive coaching engagements, sometimes the presenting problem is a [leader] not thinking strategically” (Participant 12). He later expounded that failure to think strategically has stagnated leaders and has even had an erosive effect on their organizations. He explained:

If thinking strategically about the dark corners and what's over the horizon for the business isn't done. The organization is going to hit a sandbar, I mean, the organization's gonna run up on rocks or the sustainability of its business plan could fail because the leader who loves to drive operationally hasn't lifted up and thought strategically about what the competition's doing. About what the cost of demands are. So in that case, it's not just keeping flat, it's actually erosive on the organization. (Participant 12)

The above participant emphasizes the necessity of strategic thinking in leadership. He warns that if leaders fail to consider the long-term and overlook potential threats and opportunities, the organization risks significant setbacks. Using the analogy of a ship, he described how an organization might "hit a sandbar" or "run up on rocks" if it lacks strategic foresight. Thus, operational focus alone is insufficient; leaders must also be aware of competitive actions and market demands. Neglecting this strategic perspective can erode the organization's sustainability and lead to failure.

Other participants mentioned that executives suffer from this problem, but professionals transitioning from individual contributor roles to leadership roles more often tend to lack a strategic perspective and understanding. Consequently, they elaborated that a newly promoted leader, lacking a strategic view or understanding, frequently finds themselves trapped in the individual contributor mindset, unable to see the broader picture and thus unable to utilize the expertise of their team and colleagues. For example, one coach expounded:

The problem is the best contributors don't necessarily make the best leaders. Leaders have to elevate their perspective, especially when you come into that bigger job that's so broad... You have to lead through a team and that means letting go of a lot of the stuff that used to bring you success... Can you change your definition of yourself from being a technical expert to being something broader and more capable? (Participant 14)

Basically, the coach highlights a common challenge he had observed as an executive coach in organizations: the assumption that the best individual contributors will naturally and subsequently excel as leaders. However, he explained that transitioning from being a top individual performer to a successful leader requires a significant shift in mindset and approach. This shift requires leaders to employ a strategic view, broaden their perspective, and most importantly, focus on leading through others rather than solely on their individual expertise. Therefore, as individuals ascend to higher-level positions with broader responsibilities, he explained that they should relinquish their reliance on individual success and instead prioritize team success by redefining their identity from being technical experts to becoming strategic, capable leaders who leverage the skills of others.

Furthermore, the executive coaches explained that without an enterprise view, leaders lack a strategic perspective, highlighting the importance of having a broader view. This leads them to adopt a narrow perspective. For instance, they may tend to micromanage details instead of delegating. To elucidate this point, one participant said, “The other derailment factor is that I find that people who are moving from individual contributors to leaders. They don’t know how to let go of the work, so [they lack] delegation... a huge indicator of potential derailment” (Participant 13). Another explained, “So now let’s say they get promoted to vice president... they need to shift the amount of time they spend doing the task itself to helping others understand why we need to do these things (Participant 6). Another coach stated, “[The] derailer for [leaders]...is that they can’t think systemically. They can’t truly play at the enterprise level”

(Participant 8). Furthermore, one participant explained why it is important to have that enterprise-strategic mind, she said:

A leader needs to be in the moment of what's going on at the same time, knowing what's ahead of them, what's behind them, what's on the side of them, and being able to manage all of those piece parts in a way that allows us to go forward. (Participant 19)

In other words, this participant is noting that leaders should be fully present in the current situation while also maintaining awareness of the future, the past, and the surrounding environment. This comprehensive situational awareness enables the leader to manage various elements and navigate the organization forward effectively.

In summary, participants identified the lack of a strategic view or understanding as a significant derailer for leaders. They emphasized the importance of embracing enterprise thinking, which involves broadening one's perspective and cultivating an understanding of the organization's bigger picture. Enterprise thinking, therefore, is the strategic practice of considering the entire organization in decision-making processes, rather than focusing solely on individual groups or departments. This holistic approach enables leaders to make more informed decisions that align with the organization's overarching goals and objectives.

Subtheme 3.3: Struggles in Adapting to Change

Within the subtheme of struggles in adapting to change, some participants mentioned that leaders who struggle to adapt or reject change are more prone to derailment. When participants mentioned the difficulties or consequences they observed with leaders and their struggles in adapting to change, I grouped references accordingly. According to the references and stories provided by participants, struggles with adapting to change encapsulate the challenges leaders face when encountering new initiatives or innovative disruptions. It's crucial to emphasize this

because, as Kotter (2012) emphasizes, leaders are tasked with guiding their teams through periods of uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity, underscoring the vital role they play in leading organizations.

However, the process of adapting to change can be fraught with difficulties. Some participants stated that change is a constant; it is unavoidable, and leaders who adapt to change do better than those who do not. They emphasized that leaders who embrace change are more adaptable and can keep progressing. However, they clarified that leaders who struggle with change tend to become mired in the past, leading to detrimental limitations. Moreover, one participant clarified that the problem has two components: one is a dislike for change, and the other is an inability to handle incessant change and not having the organizational support needed to adapt to it. He explained:

One [derailing factor] is inability or a struggle to keep up with the pace of change. I think what we're seeing is the world is changing in so many ways in a simultaneous concurrent timeframe that you can't just focus on delivering one change because there's other changes happening at the same time...I'm supposed to be self-sufficient. So I can suddenly feel quite vulnerable, quite exposed because I'm asked to do things I've never done before. Without the sense that there's the support available. (Participant 20)

In the narrative above, according to the participant, the challenge of keeping up with the pace of change emerges as a significant derailing factor for individuals in leadership positions. The relentless and simultaneous nature of change in today's world presents a formidable challenge, requiring leaders to adapt quickly to multiple shifts occurring concurrently. This dynamic demands a high degree of agility, resilience, and concurrent openness to new ways of thinking and operating. Moreover, according to some participants, the struggle to keep pace with change can evoke feelings of vulnerability and exposure among leaders. The expectation of self-sufficiency in addressing unfamiliar challenges can compound those feelings, leaving leaders

feeling isolated and unsupported in their endeavors. Hence, leaders may feel exposed to the risks and uncertainties inherent in navigating uncharted territory, as if they were tightrope walkers without safety nets.

Furthermore, some participants shared that leaders who struggle with or reject change can suffer unfavorable outcomes that lead to failure. One coach cited Blockbuster's poor leadership, which did not embrace nor adapt to the changes that market forces and their customers were seeking, as an example of the consequences of rejecting change. She explained:

[Derailers are] I'm gonna say resistance to change...the organizations that are probably no longer here are the ones that were not able to pivot outside of the trends in the world, whether it's world economy, world circumstances...they weren't able to pivot. Because they were resisting...but resistance to change can have a lot to do with the level of leader, more of an egotistical way of thinking like, I'm right, or we will see, and blockbuster is attributed to that.... when you don't adapt, then you get left behind and the organization gets left behind. (Participant 10)

The participant above emphasized the pivotal role of leaders fostering change or embracing resistance to change, a significant derailer for leaders and even their organizations. She explained that leaders' egotistical mindset, believing they are always right, often leads to resistance to change and prevents necessary pivots. She explained that this is a key factor in the downfall of companies like Blockbuster, as their leaders' inability to adapt led to their obsolescence. Consequently, failure to embrace change hinders organizational progress and can ultimately result in the organization and leaders being left behind.

Moreover, one participant explained that with openness and adaptability comes success for leaders. He said, "An adaptive mindset helps you to succeed... And that will help you a lot as a leader" (Participant 18). In addition, other participants explained that at this stage in the world's complexity and speed, many leaders are struggling to adapt to changes. As a result,

participants explained that leaders who cannot adapt to change will get behind and derail. For instance, one coach explained:

An inability to adapt or change was something common to the folks who derail; I've only seen that accelerate. The velocity of change and disruptive change has been accelerating for 20 plus years. And right now, at this stage in the world's complexity and speed. If you can't adapt, you're gonna get left behind. It's the old Darwinian rule: adapt, migrate or die. (Participant 14)

This coach showed that an inability to adapt or change is common among those who derail. He noted that the pace of change and disruptive innovations has been increasing for over 20 years, and in today's complex and fast-paced world, the failure to adapt can lead to being left behind. He likened this to the Darwinian principle of "adapt, migrate, or die," highlighting the critical need for flexibility and responsiveness in leadership.

Accordingly, failure to adapt to new and different ideas, circumstances, and situations as a leader can become counterproductive and has even been traced to an unwillingness to let go of old mental habits and preferences. This is why one participant stated, "Sometimes, as you become more mature as a leader, it's [about] letting go of your old ways" (Participant 20). Another participant explained that embracing change is critical, but leaders need the proper skill set to adapt. He also emphasized that organizationally imposed transitions and promotions can be challenging due to the inherent unfamiliarity involved and the leader's unwillingness to seek it.

He stated that:

The classic example is the salesperson who looks at the organization and says, oh, the next thing for me is to be a sales manager. And you put them into sales management, and they're terrible at it...But for that leader, if they were forced, if the next step up was to do something outside their wheelhouse, that they really weren't interested in developing as a skill or didn't come naturally to them. That would derail them. (Participant 22)

The narratives above underscored the daunting tasks leaders face in grappling with the rapid pace and complexity of change. It shows the complexity of modern organizational

landscapes, where leaders are confronted with multifaceted changes that span various dimensions simultaneously. Leaders must navigate numerous concurrent adaptations, just as a juggler must skillfully manage multiple balls in the air without dropping any. These insights indicate the importance of adapting and being comfortable with change. It also explains the intricate reasons why executive coaches believe difficulty adapting to change can cause leaders to derail.

Theme 3 Summary

The theme of poor polarity management encompassed topics such as a lack of diverse leadership styles, excessive use of strengths, inadequate strategic understanding, difficulty in delegating, and challenges in adapting to change. In particular, the subthemes that covered all those areas were (1) lacking diversity of leadership styles, (2) low strategic acumen, and (3) struggles in adapting to change. The results revealed that when leaders overuse a particular strength to the point of becoming a weakness, they derail. The results also showed that executive coaches believe leaders need to manage polarities better to be effective because leadership versatility is a function of leader effectiveness. Executive coaches also emphasized the importance of embracing change, receiving support during change, and maintaining a strategic perspective. Overall, they linked derailment to the consequences of not embracing change, lacking support during a season of change, lacking strategic acumen, and overusing one's strengths or leadership style.

Theme 4: Organizational Landmines

In this final theme, participants explained that external factors can also play a significant role in the derailment of leaders, and not just internal factors. They provided stories, metaphors, and detailed insights to explain how organizational factors can derail leaders. As a result, this theme is titled organizational landmines. This study presents organizational landmines as hidden,

unexpected, or unforeseen issues, obstacles, or pitfalls that threaten a leader’s stability, performance, and success within an organizational context. These landmines can manifest in a complex array of forms, including toxic work cultures, structural inefficiencies, absent feedback mechanisms, dysfunctional incentive systems, unwritten rules and politics, and bullying by colleagues and supervisors. Also, organizational landmines may include systemic dysfunctions or cultural norms that undermine collaboration and ethical conduct. Just as landmines are concealed beneath the surface and can detonate unexpectedly, organizational landmines can lurk beneath the visible layers of an organization, posing dangers that may undermine a leader's effectiveness.

All the executive coaches interviewed categorically stated that organizational factors can influence leaders toward derailment or success. As a result, during the data analysis, I identified several subthemes through the clustering of references and cross-references that connected counterproductive organizational influences to leader derailment. Altogether, the subthemes that were clustered from the 22 interviews in this category (external factors) were (1) the absence of feedback to leaders, (2) misalignment between leader, organizational culture, and structures, (3) office politics: unwritten rules of the game and low idiosyncrasy credits, and (4) abuse and workplace bullying. Table 1 shows that 22 transcripts, representing 100% of the participants, referenced and discussed the theme of organizational landmines.

Table 5

Results of Theme 4

Theme 4: Organizational Landmines
Subtheme 4.1: The Absence of Feedback to Leaders

Subtheme 4.2: Misalignment Between Leader, Organizational Culture, and Structures
Subtheme 4.3: Office Politics: Unwritten Rules of the Game and Low Idiosyncrasy Credits
Subtheme 4.4: Abuse and Workplace Bullying

Subtheme 4.1: The Absence of Feedback to Leaders

Participants shared their observations and insights when they were asked about the importance of feedback to leaders and the consequences of leaders not getting feedback. First, the absence of feedback to leaders is a situation where individuals within an organization fail to provide constructive input, evaluation, or commentary to a leader regarding their performance, decisions, or behaviors. When feedback is lacking, leaders may operate in isolation and become unaware of their blind spots or areas for growth, potentially hindering their effectiveness and impeding organizational progress (London & Smither, 2002). As a result, without timely and meaningful feedback, leaders may struggle to gauge their impact, make better-informed decisions, or meet the demanding needs of their organization.

Under the subtheme of the absence of feedback to leaders, I clustered the various references that participants made about the importance of feedback for leader effectiveness and the dangers of lacking feedback. I analyzed both and highlighted what the executive coaches said about them. Participants shared their views as executive coaches and as former corporate executives. They explained the various variables required for feedback to be valuable and helpful because certain variables must be present for feedback to benefit a leader. These variables include data quality, context, veracity, confidentiality, objectivity, timeliness, respect for the assessor, data collaboration, non-threatening power dynamics, and, most importantly, the

recipient's receptivity (or humility) to feedback.

Participants stressed that feedback is not just crucial but also invaluable for leadership survival, longevity, and continued development. They also pointed out that while feedback is important, its effectiveness and application are contingent on a variety of factors. Importantly, many participants highlighted the potential risks of a leader lacking feedback over time. This study thus not only highlighted the benefits of feedback, as articulated by the coaches, but also the dangers of its absence.

First, a coach with over 20 years of coaching experience emphatically stated, “If you’re starved of feedback, it’s like being starved of oxygen” (Participant 14). Another coach expressed that, “If you don’t get that candid feedback, you’re headed straight towards derailment” (Participant 2). These coaches highlighted that feedback is critical to leadership success and development. Moreover, when a leader is derailing, participants mentioned that some leaders might not even know it due to being starved of a feedback loop. However, as one coach explained, “If you’re in a leadership position, people will tell you, you are wonderful because they don’t want you to dislike them” (Participant 9). This is why one participant stated that, due to the cruciality of feedback and its profound impact on leader success and development, “it’s necessary to have really good, objective, confidential feedback as a leader” (Participant 4).

Furthermore, another coach mentioned that feedback is often not elicited, and thus, it is not received. She said, “Speaking to other people, getting feedback is sometimes not fully utilized (Participant 3). As a result, she later explained that leaders who do not have feedback suffer from an information gap about their behavior and performance. Another participant clarified, “Feedback is the only information that gives us an idea as to how we can improve or how we can keep working on things” (Participant 21).

Furthermore, coaches emphasized that while feedback is essential, it requires other criteria to be valuable and practical for leaders. One coach explained, “The degree of its helpfulness is a factor of two things. Number one is the quality of the data presented—the quality of the content. The other big factor is [a leader’s] receptivity (Participant 12). In a similar vein, another coach emphasized the significance of receptivity in the usefulness of feedback, stating, “I have a client at the moment who really knows that they have to work on something because of the feedback... [leaders] if you’re not willing to reflect or to take it on board. It’s a waste” (Participant 15).

Next, the coaches explained the obstacles to feedback, elucidating why leaders often fail to receive it. One remarked, “My partner...[referenced] wrote that as you move up the ladder, a couple of things happen. First off, the same old ideas and the same old jokes are all of a sudden a lot funnier. And you get less and less straight feedback” (Participant 14). Essentially, he notes that when honest feedback is absent, leaders are in danger of being deceived or placed in a bubble of flattery rather than reality. Similarly, another coach said that when one becomes a leader, people will hide the truth from you and say what they believe you want to hear. For example, “When you’re a leader, people tell you what you want to hear” (Participant 17). Another coach explained this phenomenon differently and in detail, saying that feedback is good; however, it is often ineffective and useless because other variables, such as power structures, limit its usefulness, effectiveness, and reach. He expounded:

Because the higher up you are in the power system, the more, the slower people recognize that you're on the slippery slope. So there I think there are two things that contribute to the delusion of others about a person when they're on this process of beginning to derail. One is, the higher up they are, the harder it is to call it and there are all sorts of power issues. So, the higher up you go, the more defenses there are because of the power structures. (Participant 1)

The participant above sheds light on the negative dynamics surrounding the early identification of leadership derailment within organizational hierarchies. He explains that as individuals ascend to higher positions within the power structure, their authority and influence often increase, accompanied by a greater expectation from others. Paradoxically, however, this elevation in status can also serve as a barrier to recognizing signs of derailment. He highlighted the critical components that contribute to this phenomenon. The hierarchical nature of some organizations creates power dynamics that make it challenging for subordinates or peers to present leaders with helpful feedback, especially those in more senior positions. As a result, the inherent power differentials may inhibit individuals from speaking up or expressing concerns about a leader's behavior or performance, fearing repercussions or backlash. Consequently, leaders, especially those at the apex of organizational power structures, may find themselves increasingly isolated and shielded from external feedback, making it difficult for them to recognize signs of derailment and subsequently receive feedback and help from others.

Apart from the power dynamics that tend to prevent leaders from receiving feedback, other coaches underscored other facets of feedback and why it is critical to detecting derailment and fostering leadership growth. Despite the benefits of feedback and how it can keep leaders aware of their derailment risks, coaches mentioned that another key variable is the value of the person giving the feedback. This is important because if the feedback receiver does not respect the feedback giver, then the feedback may become stalled and devalued. Note that this does not imply it is a negative practice; it simply indicates that a leader may experience fewer feedback loops if they do not respect those around them. One coach explained why:

The important thing is who has given the feedback and when have they given the feedback. Does the person have a good relationship with this individual where they're gonna take the feedback in the way it was intended, as an opportunity to do better? Or are

they gonna see it as a personal threat in which case it won't do any good at all.
(Participant 20)

Overall, the resounding emphasis was that feedback is critical for leaders to avoid the problem of derailment. Moreover, this study underscored that feedback effectiveness and usefulness depend on multiple variables. These variables include data quality, context, veracity, confidentiality, objectivity, timeliness, respect for the assessor, data collaboration, non-threatening power dynamics, and, most importantly, the recipient's receptivity (or humility) to feedback. However, the absence of those variables can leave a leader's blind spot unaddressed and unchecked, potentially leading to their detriment and derailment. In other words, without feedback, leaders may be unable to accurately assess their performance and understand how their actions impact others. They may lack awareness of their behaviors and attitudes, which may harm or demotivate their team and organization. Ultimately, this can cause leaders to make decisions that are not in the best interest of their team and organization, potentially leading to their derailment.

Subtheme 4.2: Misalignment Between Leader, Organizational Culture, and Structures

Under the subtheme, I grouped all the references that participants made about how misalignment between leaders and their organizations can contribute to leader derailment. Consequently, I named this subtheme, misalignment between leaders, organizational culture, and structures. This misalignment refers to a situation where a leader's values and processes are at odds with an organization's cultural norms and systematic structures. It represents a discordance or incongruity of critical elements between an organization and one or many of its leaders. First, an organizational culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape behavior and guide decision-making (Schein, 2010). Therefore, a misalignment between a

leader's values and their organizational culture can create tension, ambiguity, and resistance. This discordance may lead to a lack of cohesion, morale, and commitment, ultimately impacting performance and productivity (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). Conversely, organizational structures refer to the formal systems, processes, roles, and hierarchies that establish the structure and execution of work within an organization (Mintzberg, 1979, 1980). This study has found that misalignment between a leader's vision, personality, and leadership style and pre-existing organizational structures can result in inefficiencies or conflicts. For instance, a leader advocating for or preferring a flat organizational structure based on collaboration and empowerment may encounter resistance in a rigid hierarchical or bureaucratic organization with a centralized decision-making process. Also, misalignment between leaders and their organizational structures can be likened to a musical ensemble performing out of sync. Just as a symphony orchestra relies on harmonious coordination and alignment among its musicians to produce a cohesive and melodious performance, organizations require alignment among their leaders, culture, and structures to achieve synergy and coherence in pursuit of the organization's goals.

The executive coaches elaborated why a misalignment between leaders and their organizations can lead to derailment. This is due to its complexity and often misunderstood impact on leaders. For example, one coach explained, "[Leaders] you have certain expectations that you go into an organization with, and if the organization doesn't support those expectations, there's going to be a clash... a values mismatch is big" (Participant 9). Furthermore, other participants clarified that leaders often fail to understand that pre-existing organizational cultures and structures can significantly impact whether they succeed. The data showed various insights, revealing the subtle and complex ways organizational culture and structure can adversely impact

leaders. One participant shared that a merger or acquisition alters circumstances, potentially leading to a value mismatch as the leader struggles to connect and align with the newly formed company. When asked about external organizational derailers, the participant said, “The classic [derailer] of the merger and an acquisition, you know, the change of culture” (Participant 15). In addition to mergers and acquisitions causing derailment, other coaches emphasized other aspects of how organizational culture and structures can derail leaders. They explained how a leader’s working approach, value system, life philosophy, and personality can conflict with their organization, leading to miscommunication, misalignment, and failure. For example, according to one of the coaches:

If you're a leader who likes to be helpful...you're not going to do well if you're in a ruthless organization and you're a collaborative person...In a Machiavellian organization, you're not going to see a whole lot of amiables' [friendly/supportive leaders] last very long there. (Participant 22)

Other coaches echoed and cross-referenced the previous coach's earlier point, emphasizing that even an effective leader with a successful track record in their previous company or organization may discover that their values conflict with their new organization. Therefore, a leader may enter an organization believing it to be their ideal workplace based on the organization’s marketing of their values and beliefs. However, they may later discover that these were merely espoused values, not reflected in the organization’s actual practices. This underscores the importance of understanding an organization’s culture and structure before accepting a job offer, especially for leaders. One coach used an adage to get the point across and explained the problem. He said, “Company culture does have an impact [on derailment]. You know, there’s an old adage that says the values on the walls get walked on in the halls” (Participant 21).

The impact of culture on a leader's performance and effectiveness, an area that some coaches felt was often overlooked, has one of the most significant bearing on a leader's success. To uncover this point, one executive coach explained succinctly, "If you don't know the culture of the company you're going into, my friend, it will spew you out" (Participant 17). In other words, an organizational culture has the subtle influence of embracing or rejecting a leader's methods and initiatives. Hence, if a leader's conventions and practices do not align with their organizational culture, they cannot succeed; instead, they will face counterproductive consequences and possibly even termination. This is why one participant noted that:

Organizational culture perhaps has the biggest bearing on the success of anything...it's great to sort of set this vision for this massive transformation [you are planning] but if the culture is still stuck where it was, it's not going to work. (Participant 20)

Moreover, it is crucial to underscore the inescapable influence of organizational culture on leadership and its connection to leader derailment. As one coach astutely noted, "The environment is always going to affect you [positively or negatively] to an extent" (Participant 18). In other words, an organizational culture can impact a leader, whether or not they are cognizant of it. Understanding this influence is crucial because a value mismatch between leaders and organizations could significantly impede a leader's success. Therefore, it is vital to be aware that some leaders may derail not due to incompetence, but because of differences with their organizational culture. For instance, another coach explained that leaders could be expected to achieve results in ways that may conflict with their ethics, and this could have a detrimental effect on their performance. She depicted that:

Culture plays a huge role in being able to be successful in your career... Oftentimes, you'll find that your values may not match your business's values, and that can derail you when you're not willing to cross lines, when you're not willing to do things that others might want you to do. Ethics becomes a real issue. Integrity becomes a real issue for you in certain corporations where folks are willing to do anything to get ahead that may not fit with you and that may derail you in that environment. (Participant 19)

Furthermore, apart from a cultural misalignment derailing a leader, executive coaches also stated that organizational structures can cause derailment. It is important to understand that it has a huge influence on a leader's ability to succeed and function effectively. For example, many coaches pointed out that in particular, *matrix organizations* often derail leaders. Matrix organizations are complex organizational structures that combine functional and project-based reporting relationships, allowing employees and leaders to work across multiple organizational dimensions simultaneously (Daft, 2015). Matrix organizations often require significant coordination, negotiation, consensus-building, and alignment across diverse stakeholders and among different functional areas and project teams (Harris, 1990; Senge, 1990). One key disadvantage for leaders in matrix organizations is the potential for role ambiguity and conflicting priorities (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Leaders may find themselves torn between the demands of different projects or functional areas, leading to confusion about where to allocate time, resources, and attention. This ambiguity can undermine leadership effectiveness and create frustration among team members, who may feel neglected or unclear about their roles and responsibilities. Another challenge for leaders in matrix organizations is the complexity of communication and decision-making processes (Galbraith, 2008). With multiple reporting lines and stakeholders to manage, leaders may encounter bureaucratic delays, coordination challenges, and difficulty achieving consensus (Senge, 1990). This complexity can slow down decision-making processes, reduce agility, and impede the organization's responsiveness to changing circumstances. As a result, leaders in matrix organizations may face increased interpersonal conflicts and power struggles (Harris, 1990). In addition, in matrix organizations, constant political maneuvering may be required, and this internal tension can potentially create a divisive

and politically charged work environment that undermines a leader's effectiveness. Therefore, due to the bureaucracy, politics, and lack of clarity around responsibility and communication, several coaches explained in detail how matrix organizations tend to contribute to the derailment of leaders, which some witnessed personally. One participant recounted:

The other thing that I've seen, which is a real problem, top to bottom, is unclear roles and responsibilities. So there's no real requisite, what I call requisite structure...if I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing, you know, just directionally, it's going to be a problem, and sometimes you can have cultures that are too rigid, they become too bureaucratic. Sometimes, when you have very smart people in bureaucratic cultures, they get frustrated...they engage in behaviors that are not productive. You know, sometimes in those cultures, leaders becoming eccentric, they become eccentric...yes external factors do contribute to derailment. Absolutely. (Participant 11)

Furthermore, other coaches noted that a leader's operational style and disposition can also conflict with their organizational structures, particularly matrix ones. One coach explained the reasons in depth and showed how they could trigger derailing behaviors in leaders. He stated:

The best [derailing] example for me is operating in a matrix organization. Because I think matrix organizations are particularly fraught for people, especially those that have a pension for structure, clear expectations, concrete performance goals, and so forth...There's an ambiguity [in matrix organizations] and that will create stress for people, you know, how do I operate? How do I form a network? (Participant 5)

Next, the same coach expounded on other elements of the problem. He stated that:

There are some companies that have particularly been highly regulated. Both can be very challenging for individuals who like greater latitude, better freedom, who like to operate without any specific boundaries about what it is that they can do or what they can achieve. So I think that there's oftentimes an interaction between the nature of a person's personality and the structure and culture in which they're operating. So for example, some people who are detail oriented and control oriented, they love it [procedures and systems] because it's very clear. But people who are more expensive, more creative, more unconventional, in some ways more innovative; they detest bureaucratic organizations because they're full of constraints. And so to operate in that kind of an environment will oftentimes lead to considerable unhappiness and the exhibition of derailing behaviors. (Participant 5)

The quotation above principally highlights the challenge that arises when there is a mismatch or

misalignment between an individual's personality and their work environment. Highly regulated companies often set strict procedures and boundaries, which can stifle individuals who prefer greater freedom and latitude. These clear structures can be satisfying and supportive for detail-oriented and control-focused individuals. However, for those who are more creative, unconventional, and innovative, such environments can feel constraining and lead to significant dissatisfaction and derailing behaviors. This interaction between personal traits and organizational culture is crucial. Understanding it is not just a matter of academic interest, but it can engage us and pique our curiosity in understanding why specific individuals may struggle or thrive in different organizational settings.

Moreover, one coach highlighted another reason why organizational structures can derail leaders. He noted that misaligned compensation and incentive structures are a factor that contributes to leader derailment. This misalignment of compensation and incentive structure arises when the rules governing rewards and penalties are not well-designed. In such scenarios, individuals act in self-interest, which might not align with the overall desired outcomes of the organization. One example given is when a company asks that leaders and their departments compete with each other and simultaneously expects them to have camaraderie and collaboration during the process. Note that the need for camaraderie and collaboration in the workplace is crucial, as it fosters a healthy work environment and promotes team success. However, when competition and collaboration clash and a leader chooses competition over collaboration, there will be problems. In explaining this problem of a misaligned compensation and incentive structure, one coach explained why:

Third thing that derails [leaders], that's part of the culture, the organizational structure: When you get to the top, compensation systems are completely misaligned with what we say we want to do with our operating model. You get paid based on your business

contribution, your P&L (profit and loss). There's no room in that for collaboration, the reality that you've got to work across the matrix. And I see that misalignment trips people up all the time, their incentives are over getting their shit [tasks] done and not compromising and sacrificing for the greater good. But you fire the guy despite his great numbers because he's pissed so many people off because he's not playing nice in the sandbox [within the organization] and he doesn't have any incentive to, except for you're eventually going to get tired of this stuff and fire him. (Participant 14)

This coach vividly illustrates how misaligned compensation systems can derail organizational leaders. At the top levels, leaders are often rewarded based on their business contributions and profit and loss metrics. This creates a disconnect between the personal incentives they are pursuing, and the collaborative behavior expected within the organization's operating model. For instance, leaders might achieve impressive numbers but may fail to foster collaboration with other departments, leading to conflicts and dissatisfaction among colleagues. This potential for conflict and dissatisfaction among colleagues underscores the urgency of addressing misaligned compensation systems. Eventually, despite their success, these leaders might be dismissed because their lack of cooperation and alignment with organizational values becomes too disruptive and distracting. As a result, misaligned compensation systems cause friction, confusion, uncontrollable competition, and disruption because they cause leaders to approach their responsibilities in a way that later derails them. Hence, this misalignment between incentives and organizational goals is a significant factor in leadership derailment.

Overall, this subtheme showed that a mismatch between a leader's personality and the organization's operating structure, a misaligned compensation and incentive structure, a values mismatch between leaders and their organizational culture, and a merger and acquisition can derail leaders.

Subtheme 4.3: Office Politics: Unwritten Rules of the Game and Low Idiosyncrasy Credits

Under the subtheme of Office Politics: Unwritten Rules of the Game and Low Idiosyncrasy Credits, I grouped references from participants that discussed how office politics, such as networking, conforming to group expectations, and fostering alliances, can influence a leader's likeability, success, and group approval within their organization. First, office politics is a complex phenomenon in organizational life. It is an informal power dynamic of alliances and strategies individuals employ to gain an advantage, influence decision-making, and advance their team and self-interests (Mintzberg, 1985). These political behaviors may include networking, coalition-building, and favoritism, among others (Ferris et al., 1996). Next, idiosyncrasy credits are the social currency individuals accrue within a group by demonstrating a consistent loyalty and commitment to the group's expectations, as well as the degree of leniency or latitude that a group affords to an individual whenever they deviate from group norms in instances of experimentation or error (Hollander, 1958). Applying this to leaders, they earn idiosyncrasy credits over time by consistently demonstrating competence, sociability, hard work, and adherence to group norms and standards. On the other hand, this study defines low idiosyncrasy credits as the absence or reduced level of approval, goodwill, and leeway that followers and peers afford to a leader. Therefore, low idiosyncrasy credits can have significant implications for leader effectiveness. Leaders with low idiosyncrasy credits may face heightened resistance or skepticism from followers when attempting to introduce new ideas, implement changes, or exercise authority (Hollander, 1978). This lack of trust, credibility, and likeability can erode peers and followers' willingness to cooperate, collaborate, or align with a leader's initiatives or vision.

Many coaches suggested that being unaware of the political dynamics within an organization can cost a leader because they could be aloof to power dynamics and information that they otherwise should know. Participants also mentioned that leaders who refrain from engaging in organizational politics are in danger of being ineffective and may lack a persuasive edge due to not having idiosyncrasy credits and a support network that comes from building alliances of work supporters and friends. According to one of the executive coaches, idiosyncrasy credits profoundly affect whether a leader derails or not. This is due to the various levels of emotional attachment and affinity that a leader may or may not possess within the organization. For instance, if a leader with high idiosyncrasy credits makes a big mistake, people within the organization may forgive or excuse their mistake by giving them their idiosyncrasy credits within the said organization. However, if another leader, this time with low idiosyncrasy credits, makes that same mistake, the executive coach noted that they will face the consequences and potentially without room for redemption. He explained:

The second [cause of derailment] has to do with idiosyncrasy credits...let me put it in today's terms, that you will forgive a leader for the same transgressions that you will vilify or hate another leader because you're giving that person your idiosyncrasy credits. And what I have added to it is: if you emotionally like a person, and since the emotional decisions happen unconsciously in one thousandth (1/1,000) of a second (one millisecond), so you're not always aware you're giving them idiosyncrasy credits.
(Participant 1)

The coach cited above uncovered the intriguing concept of “idiosyncrasy credits,” suggesting that people are more forgiving of leaders they emotionally like, even if those leaders commit the same mistakes that they would condemn in others. He mentioned that these emotional decisions, occurring unconsciously and rapidly, are a key factor in leadership dynamics, influencing people’s tolerance and support for certain leaders regardless of their flaws or shortcomings. As a result, people give leaders they like a higher level of idiosyncrasy and more leeway for

transgressions than those without such emotional favor. For instance, if one leader receives punishment and another goes free when they make equivalent mistakes, it speaks volumes about idiosyncrasy credits' impact on a leader's derailment risk and success trajectory. Hence, it brings to light another dimension of the leader derailment problem.

Furthermore, regarding how idiosyncrasy credits or an emotional bond affects leader derailment, one participant explained that she has seen its impact. She also mentioned how it sometimes determines whether or not a leader derails. She explained:

I have seen far, far more cases than I would like the judgments of somebody else in the organization...ultimately becoming their derailer. A guy I talked to this week was accused of not supporting women. There is zero evidence that is a consistent pattern, though there was one woman in his organization that he pushed pretty hard because her performance was really bad...she complained, she happened to have friends in lots and lots of places. She rallied all of her friends to convince how horrible he was. And so he got under investigation for that. Obviously, there's no evidence of inappropriate behavior. So he passed the investigation. (Participant 2)

The above quote was followed up with another point; she explained that when another person's judgment within an organization negatively affects a leader's career trajectory, it often happens because the leader lacks a support network within that organization. She also raised the point that this negative judgment can arise anywhere within the organizational hierarchy. She argues that having a support network within the organization—people who can vouch for one because they know and understand one's behavior and thinking—is the solution to the problem.

Furthermore, another coach shared a story about a senior leader who got fired from a company despite outperforming his colleagues in all performance metrics. Outside of the company, industry associations even celebrated him in newsletters. Nevertheless, he was eventually dismissed. She explained that his boss and peers disliked him due to his aloofness and distance, which ultimately led to his downfall. Put differently, he was unliked and lacked an

organizational support network because he lacked high idiosyncrasy credits. She explained, “He was fired...It is not about being excellent at what you do. It’s about building the relationships around you...but if you don’t take the time to develop relationships with your peers and seniors, you can be derailed” (Participant 9).

In addition, when it comes to understanding politics or, as participants called it, the game's unwritten rules, some coaches emphasized the importance of identifying and understanding it because, according to them, lacking that understanding could be costly. One remarked:

The politics are incredibly sophisticated and complex at the top...at the top of organizations, here’s the deal, the savvy power players who are good with politics, they understand you keep your friends close...first off, just my observation, a lot of really good you know, salt of the earth type people, good values, hard workers want to do the right thing. I noticed they had a bad attitude about politics. You raise politics: Oh, well, I'm not political. I don't play politics. And I'd always say the same stuff to them. You’re awfully naive. You won't be long in this organization. Well, my results should speak for themselves [they argue]. Well, shit, there's a lot of things that shouldn't be the case. Let me tell you how it is. Your results don't speak for themselves. You have to find a way to promote the success of your team and business in a way that's not ego, chest pounding sorts of things. But if you don't broadcast that, to some degree, you're gonna get overlooked by somebody else who's just bloviating full of shit, doesn't have the substance, but can talk a great game. You have to be able to compete with those jerks. (Participant 14)

Essentially participant 14 highlights the complex interplay between a leader's derailment and the impact of organizational politics. He describes the intricate and sophisticated nature of politics at the top levels of organizations. He observes that many hardworking, ethical individuals often disdain politics, believing their results should speak for themselves. However, the coach argues that this attitude is naive and detrimental because success at the top requires achieving results and effectively promoting and communicating those successes within the organization. Hence, leaders who fail to do this risk being overshadowed by those who are less capable but more adept

at self-promotion and political maneuvering.

In addition, another coach supported the abovementioned point; she commented that organizational politics can impact leaders negatively if they are unaware of how to play it or have a wrong idea about it. As a result, she clarified her reasoning. She noted that:

[It is] how you are able to convince, to negotiate, to influence. It's what allows you to play the game... it's being able to know the unwritten rules... It's also understanding how things get done. Who are the players?... Politics is not a bad word. That's what I try to communicate to my clients. Politics is not a bad word unless you want to see it as a bad word. Politics is how do people engage to get something done, that's what politics is. (Participant 19)

She essentially underlined the importance of understanding and playing organizational politics by learning to work together with people and learning to influence people at work to one's advantage ethically as a leader in order to succeed. Another participant echoed almost an identical statement and sentiment. He explained:

In fact, one of the things you may have discovered if not yet, you will, the number of people who say you know what, I'm just not political. And they treat it as if it's a pejorative term. And in a lot of instances it is, but I think that is bunk [to think that always], because anybody that operates in any organization on the planet knows it has its own political dynamics. And I think, trying to parse for people what political means and its pejorative connotations, which are around manipulation and achieving one's own personal aspirations at the expense of others is important. That sort of thing. Of course, nobody wants to really be accused of manipulation but the other thing is, politics is also about relationship building. And you've got to be very skillful in doing that, but you can be political and still be trustworthy, you can still be you and can be political and still be transparent. You can be political and still focus on the enterprise performance versus your own performance or in addition to your own performance. So there are ways of being political that I think people in large organizations in particular really need to embrace and do well if they're going to get ahead. (Participant 5)

Similarly, another participant shared his personal story. He discussed the significance of being visible as a leader and understanding how an organization functions, particularly for people of color and women. He shared his experience, which happened before he became an executive coach many years ago. He stated that his method and unfamiliarity with his company

led to resistance from peers and subordinates, eventually leading to a meeting about his dismissal. He emphasized the need to find mentors or sponsors who can provide insights into an organization's unwritten rules and dynamics. He also emphasized the essence of understanding and respecting the organizational culture one finds oneself in and taking the time to engage with people regularly. He asserted that a leader's success stems from this, not solely from talent. He expounded:

It's not about pedigree, my friend. Relationship, relationship, relationship. Because that's what builds the image. And image is what gets you promoted. Relationships give you exposure, the exposure creates an image and the image is ultimately who they are promoting...who knows you and how do they know you? And when they hear your name what do they think? That's what gets you promoted. When you hit a certain level, it's no longer about performance...company says we want you to show up as your authentic self, bullshit. Yes, if you fit their image, if not you are out. Be aware, the rules of the game are unwritten. (Participant 17)

The quote above shows that office politics can positively or negatively affect a leader's career trajectory. In other words, the unwritten rules of the game and idiosyncrasy credits greatly influence whether a leader succeeds or derails. As one coach said, "It is important what we think about ourselves behaviorally. But it is as if not more important what other people think" (Participant 16).

Overall, the executive coaches highlighted the necessity and significance of building high idiosyncrasy credits through relationship building, knowing the right people as a leader, and cultivating an organizational network of supporters who see one favorably. This knowledge, they underscored, can protect or mitigate the adverse effects of office politics.

Subtheme 4.4: Abuse and Workplace Bullying

Within the subtheme of abuse and workplace bullying, I grouped different statements made by participants about the bullying and abusive actions some leaders face from their peers

and supervisors. First, what is workplace bullying? It is the persistent mistreatment, harassment, or intimidation of an individual by one or more coworkers or superiors (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). This behavior may manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, threats, exclusion, withholding of information, or sabotage, and it can have detrimental effects on the targeted individual's psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and performance (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; 2018). It is crucial to note that colleagues and superiors often perpetuate such behavior. Some participants noted that workplace bullying psychologically breaks down a leader and it is another factor that has contributed to the derailment of some leaders.

When participants were asked if they had witnessed or heard about leaders being bullied, some said no, while others said yes. If they said yes, a follow-up question was asked to assemble the details. I highlighted what the executive coaches described and the impact on leadership performance. Participants who had witnessed or observed bullying behaviors against leaders mentioned that when leaders are at the receiving end of bullying, it has a demoralizing and disempowering effect. They shared real-life stories as examples. For instance, one of them said, “There have been situations where senior managers are bullying other vice presidents (Participant 12). Another coach depicted how bullying plays out organizationally and shared what he observed. He explained:

In the same organization I'm talking about, I think it's fair to say the SVP in charge of field operation was bullied by the folks in mass markets and government contracts—by both of those business heads. I would say they did bully him. He would come to meetings with the data showing look, hey, here's deal flow. Here's our resource needs. The math doesn't work. We got to increase our budget to get to this and they would hammer the guy. They would hammer him in a personal way. They wouldn't attack his analysis. They will try to chip away at his credibility and reputation.In the corporate world, here's what bullying looks like: Never any praise or recognition for the good stuff you've done. A steady stream of criticism and negative stuff and then the personal stuff, those ad hominem attacks. It's character assassination. (Participant 14)

The quotation above shows that bullying occurs even at an organization's highest ranks. In the organization depicted, the participant remarked that one SVP in charge of field operations experienced significant bullying from the heads of mass markets and government contracts. This bullying took the form of relentless personal attacks rather than critiques of his work. Despite presenting well-founded data and analysis regarding resource needs and budget requirements, he faced continuous character assassination. The participant 14 also expounded on the fact that workplace bullying tends to include a lack of recognition for one's achievements, constant criticism, and ad hominem attacks aimed at undermining credibility and reputation. This narrative highlights how workplace bullying in the corporate world can even manifest as a systematic effort to damage an individual's professional standing and personal integrity.

Furthermore, another participant gave an additional insight into the problem of workplace bullying, he explained that its effect is the same for leaders and non-leaders. He stated that:

One is under more stress physiologically, which leads to a degree of defensiveness and we now have the neurological evidence and hormonal evidence to show that when people are under that degree of chronic stress, they are cognitively, emotionally and perceptually impaired. So it doesn't even have to be acute stress. You know, the person doesn't have to physically abuse you or shout names at you for you to experience it as stressful... You defend yourself by literally pulling in... it compromises people's creativity, their performance, their motivation. (Participant 1)

In other words, bullying causes leaders or individuals to become stressed and physiologically defensive, which can lead to cognitive, emotional, and perceptual impairments. This does not require acute stress or overt abuse; even subtle, ongoing stressors can trigger these responses. Consequently, the participant mentioned that individuals may withdraw and become less creative, motivated, and effective in their performance. Also, he explained that the neurological and hormonal evidence supports these findings, indicating that workplace abuse can lead to chronic stress, which significantly hampers an individual's ability to function optimally.

Many other coaches interviewed, assented to the fact that leaders get bullied and further described how negatively it affects their performance and career. In fact, one participant shared a personal story of a late leader she knew (her sorority sister) who died of suicide due to being bullied and isolated. She mentioned that:

There's a post on LinkedIn right now you can go out and find it, of a university leader [a vice-president], she's a sorority sister of mine who committed suicide, because she was bullied by her direct leader and getting no support and no advocacy. That situation is highly documented...Because that can literally make or break your career. And she felt alone...it breaks the person's career...It can be career damaging and it can break their spirit. And the reality is it's systemic. It's happening in workplaces and spaces, universities, and governmental agencies. (Participant 10)

In addition, another participant shared an example of what she witnessed. She stated:

“Yes. I see [bullying] it happening. Yes. I've seen it happen at the board level where the Board Chair will bully the CEO. It's really sad, but it happens...I think it can be kind of shattering for them” (Participant 4). Lastly, one coach shared a story about her coachee's experience:

I've seen her cry on a regular basis based on what her other female leader has said to her. So I wonder what it is about...when you think about bullying, yeah, that would be an example...I've seen her cry on numerous occasions, and I knew her...It's the more experienced person who promotes women's leadership, making her colleague cry...there's something dysfunctional there. (Participant 3)

Overall, workplace bullying directed at leaders is an astonishing and damaging fact that can have far-reaching implications for leader effectiveness and organizational success. By exposing the occurrence and impact of workplace bullying that some leaders suffer, executive coaches highlighted another critical facet of why organizational factors can derail leaders. They have demonstrated that external factors outside a leader's control can impede their success, psychological safety, and well-being.

Theme 4 Summary

This theme identifies organizational landmines, a phenomenon where external

organizational factors adversely impact leaders, as one of the causes of leader derailment. This study, within the context of organizational landmines, highlighted the various organizational factors that executive coaches identified as contributing to leader derailment. Among these components were (1) the absence of feedback to the leader; (2) misalignment between leader, organizational culture, and structures; (3) office politics: unwritten rules of the game and low idiosyncrasy credits; and (4) abuse and workplace bullying.

A leader's lack of feedback was identified as a derailer because it prevents them from receiving external information about themselves. A lack of feedback keeps leaders in the dark about their performance, behavior, and personality. Leaders need regular feedback to understand their strengths and weaknesses and identify areas for improvement. With feedback, leaders may be aware of their impact on their team and the organization. Therefore, participants expressed that a lack of feedback can be a derailer. Next, participants identified the misalignment between a leader's personality and their organization's operating structure as a derailer that can hinder their success. This is because if a leader's style does not align with their organization's structure, they may struggle to lead effectively. Also, a value mismatch between a leader and their organization can lead to problems. If a leader's values do not align with their organization's values, they may struggle to make decisions that are in the organization's best interests. It may also cause them to do things they do not want.

Furthermore, this research identified a misaligned compensation and incentive structure as a derailing factor. Consider the possibility that when leaders are compensated for short-term results, they may be inclined to make decisions that benefit their careers at the expense of the organization's long-term health. Also, although mergers and acquisitions were only mentioned once, they were highlighted as derailers because they can significantly disrupt a leader's

effectiveness. This is because integrating two different cultures, systems, and processes can create a challenging environment for leaders to navigate. In addition, office politics was identified as another derailer because it showed that a leader's ignorance and inability to play office politics ethically could lead to their derailment. This is because such a leader will lack a supportive network to promote or support their initiatives. They may miss subtle, helpful information from colleagues and superiors that could enhance and protect their careers. The importance of understanding and playing office politics was linked to one's idiosyncrasy credits. The higher idiosyncrasy credits one has as a leader within an organization, the more politically connected they are and are thus unlikely to derail within that organization. However, the lower the idiosyncrasy credits, the more likely the leader will derail. Finally, workplace bullying directed at leaders was another derailing factor participants pinpointed in this research. It was discovered to have a demotivating, demeaning, and demoralizing effect. As a result, it negatively affects leader performance and mental health. These organizational factors underscore the correlation between leader derailment and external factors.

Overall, four themes emerged from this study's qualitative-inductive thematic analysis of the interviews. Among these were (a) *inadequate emotional intelligence*, (b) *dysfunctional personality*, (c) *poor polarity management*, and (d) *organizational landmines*. From these four main themes, 12 subthemes emerged. These themes and subthemes support this study's research question. For example, themes 1, 2, 3, and 4 reveal the answer to this study's research question, which revealed and underlined the internal and external factors that derail leaders from the perspective of executive coaches.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I share my thoughts about this study's findings and their practical and theoretical interpretations. The findings in this chapter are not just a collection of data, but they hold practical implications that can significantly impact leadership development and success. Before going into detail on the findings, it is fundamental to note that this qualitative study sought to understand why many leaders fail rather than succeed. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, this study sought the expertise of certified and trained executive coaches, whose insights were instrumental in highlighting the reasons for leader derailment. The definition of leader derailment in this study is when a promising leader's trajectory stalls, resulting in stagnation, demotion, or termination, even though they initially showed signs of success. Also, keep in mind that the leaders the executive coaches spotlighted in their interviews were civilian sector leaders. The primary research question that guided this study was: What do executive coaches perceive as the major internal and external factors derailing leaders?

A recap of Chapter 4 showed that four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data. These were (a) inadequate emotional intelligence, (b) dysfunctional personality, (c) poor polarity management, and (d) organizational landmines. These themes provide answers to this study's research question. The results suggest the following: leader derailment is a multilayered and multifaceted problem, and the subsequent findings in Chapter 5 indicate that: (1) emotional intelligence enables better leadership qualities and significantly determines how a leader is perceived; (2) an undiscovered and unregulated personality in a leader can be problematic; (3) it is imperative for leaders to discern and manage polarities; (4) an organization can become a pitfall for a leader; and (5) office politics is unavoidable and beware of workplace abuse and bullies.

Finding 1: Emotional Intelligence Enables Better Leadership Qualities and Significantly Determines How a Leader is Perceived

Throughout this study, the theme of emotional intelligence (EI) or emotional quotient (EQ) consistently emerged throughout the data. All the executive coaches interviewed stated that emotional intelligence (EI) or emotional quotient (EQ) profoundly influences a leader's prospect for success. This is due to its impact on the quality of their social interactions and relationships, their ability to manage their emotions, and their level of internal and external awareness, which are crucial for effective leadership, particularly during challenging and stressful times. Accordingly, this study has discovered that inadequate emotional intelligence in leaders contributes to derailment; it negatively impacts their performance and contains theoretical and practical outcomes, thus providing valuable insights for leadership development areas.

Emotional intelligence, a term coined by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990) and popularized by Goleman (1995), is critical to leadership. It encapsulates the aptitude to observe and understand one's own and other people's emotions, differentiate between them, and employ this knowledge to determine one's appropriate reasoning and behavior (Mayer et al., 2004). The framework of EI that this research uses comprises various domains, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2007; Colman, 2008; Mckee et al., 2008). This research discovered, in particular, that lacking self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills are incompetencies that derail leaders. This finding supports the importance of having emotional intelligence as a leader and raises concerns about the negative consequence of inadequate EI. Why did this research find that leaders with an inadequate EI or EQ range are more prone to derailment? It is because it negatively influences their performance and behavior, thus supporting prior research (Bryson, 2005; Gentry et al.,

2007; Ruderman et al., 2003). In addition, why are emotions essential to underscore? It is because emotions play a crucial role in one's behavior and decision-making. This confirms empirical evidence that emotions are consequential and critical because they precede cognitive processes (thinking) and decisions, influencing behavior independent of conscious thought processes (Phelps, 2006; Damasio, 1994; Zajonc, 1980). This influence calls for greater awareness in the fields of leadership and human capital development.

To elaborate on the effect of inadequate EI on leaders, this research has discovered that a constantly elevated and unregulated emotional state can negatively alter a leader's behavior and functioning, leading to compromised and counterproductive decision-making and poorly nurtured interpersonal relationships. For example, Mayer et al. (2004) underscored the fact that leaders with high EI contributed positively to the emotional climate and culture of their organization, suggesting that inadequate EI could lead to a less cohesive and supportive work environment, which may also have characteristics of poor psychological safety due to the leader's counterproductive influence on their team. As a result, such leaders will not be able to build and lead a team. Therefore, leaders must have a competent handle on their emotions. Therefore, leaders lacking adequate EI may struggle with managing team emotions, resolving conflicts, and fostering positive team morale, which is essential for any high-performing team. Consequently, the accumulation of such negative instances and outcomes will eventually derail a leader. For example, one of the coaches explained that inadequate emotional intelligence affects proper responsiveness to people and circumstances. He said, "It definitely does add to derailment when you have a lower level of emotional intelligence because you're less skilled in responding" (Participant 20).

Furthermore, low EI affects not only responsiveness but also relationships in general. Why are relationships meaningful and vital to leaders? This study has shown that leadership is a social enterprise, a social activity; without people, a leader cannot lead. Therefore, connecting with and understanding people is crucial for leadership. That is why an inability to understand and connect with people is a big derail. It is equally important to emphasize that emotional intelligence affects how people perceive and experience a leader. Therefore, leaders should prioritize learning or improving their EI/EQ, and organizations should promote such learning. This research has also discovered that emotional intelligence helps leaders to read the room and themselves accurately (self-awareness and situational awareness). One of the coaches phrased it succinctly: “Every leader needs to be able to read the scenario” (Participant 12). However, a leader cannot read scenarios when their emotions are roiling and disorganized, as this can lead to outbursts and various impulses. Moreover, leaders are more self-aware and can self-regulate with emotional intelligence because it enables them to pay attention to various situations and people, read the room through active listening, and manage themselves to discern what others say. Accordingly, a leader will be better equipped to show empathy, attention, and restraint from wrong and impulsive determinations. This finding reveals that emotional intelligence can predict job success, as it impacts one’s capacity to manage the continuous demands and requirements of one’s work environment and the pressures that ensue effectively. However, without this ability, a leader may experience stress, aloofness, poor relationships, and agitation, leading to incompetence and negligence. For example, one participant shared an insight, he said:

Years ago, we did a study at a company to predict derailment. We put together a series of coworker rating items 15 or so; the number one item that best predicted who derailed in the next five years: You look at your calendar, and you see, you have a meeting in the afternoon with so and so. Where is your reaction between shit and yay [unhappy and happy]? That was a pretty good predictor. (Participant 14)

The recurring theme among participants was that leaders with inadequate emotional intelligence are more likely to derail. Therefore, the ability to effectively interact with others, build and maintain relationships, and proficiently manage emotions, both one's own and those of others, is instrumental in fostering success for leaders. As a result, this study confirms that emotional intelligence is critical for leaders and discovers that inadequate emotional intelligence in leaders profoundly impacts both the theoretical and practical outcomes of leadership.

Finding 2: An Undiscovered and Unregulated Personality in a Leader Can Be Problematic

In this study, the concepts of the shadow self and dark side became significant across the data. Participants stated that if a leader fails to detect, understand, and regulate their shadow self, it can transform into a dark side, leading to behavioral problems. An example below reiterates what one of the coaches explained, “Most people in leadership and management aren’t aware of their dark sides... And if you’re blind to your dark side, you’re going to end up being not just an ineffective leader but a real jerk” (Participant 1). This suggests that an unaddressed shadow self and dark side can render a leader ineffective and inflict annoyance and pain on others around them. This is why another coach emphasized that “[leaders] tend to underestimate the impact of their dark side tendencies and their negative impact or consequence” (Participant 7).

The dark side of personality, often related to the manifestation of the shadow self in Jungian psychology, involves traits and behaviors that are socially undesirable, self-serving, and sometimes counterproductive. These include Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, which are part of the so-called “Dark Triad” (Furnham et al., 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Spain et al., 2013; Zeigler-Hill & Marcus, 2016). These traits do not necessarily stem from a lack of emotional intelligence, but rather from a more manipulative, selfish, uncaring, or even

damaging use of one's abilities and understanding of others. The critical difference lies in the nature and application of emotional insights. Inadequate EI involves a lack of understanding or skill in handling one's emotions or those of others, often leading to unintentional adverse outcomes. In contrast, the dark side can involve a conscious or subconscious decision to use an understanding of emotions (which could be well-developed) in manipulative or harmful ways, often to take advantage of or exert power over others. Furthermore, this research states that the dark side could manifest problematically as self-deception, self-sabotage, self-loathing, and a rejection of self-compassion and coaching. As a result, one coach remarked that: "the dark side tends to lead to downside [defective] thinking" (Participant 7). In essence, the unaddressed shadow self, which often turns into the dark side, can manifest itself in counterproductive behaviors that tend not to benefit leaders, their teams, and their organizations in the long run. Hence, it is often not in an organization's best interest when it surfaces. Accordingly, this is why participants in this research conveyed that a narcissistic approach to leadership is always unnecessary because "you are not as good as you think you are. None of us is as good as all of us" (Participant 18).

Furthermore, this study has also confirmed that shadow self represents the unconscious and subconscious parts of a leader's personality that the conscious ego does not identify with, consequently areas of the self that have not been fully realized or remedied can be problematic. For example, in leadership, it could mean unacknowledged desires for power, unrecognized or masquerading fears, or developed traits that are contrary to one's self-image. Therefore, from a Jungian perspective, not integrating these aspects into one's conscious mind for remedy can lead to leader ineffectiveness and dissonance if and when they manifest. As a result, it can affect a

leader's decision-making and interpersonal relationships. This brings to light why one coach stated that:

My experience over these 60 years of working in a lot of different kinds of organizations, if people have three resonant leaders in their whole career lifetime, that's something to be thankful for. Because most of the people I would contend that 70 to 80% of the people in leadership positions aren't adding value, which means they're either dissonant demagogues or clueless. (Participant 1)

In principle, many coaches emphasized that leadership is about adding value to people and not the glorification of oneself. It is why one participant said: "Leaders cannot do everything. The team goal is bigger than one individual" (Participant 9). However, when the shadow self evolves into the dark side and is not monitored and regulated, it is more likely to usher leaders towards an imprudent and egocentric approach to leadership. As a result, this study's findings underscore the crucial role of leaders understanding and managing their own shadow self and the dark side, as it plays a significant role in shaping their behavior and performance as leaders.

Finding 3: It is Imperative for Leaders to Discern and Manage Polarities

The lack of versatility, oversaturation of strengths (overused strengths), lack of strategic acumen, and difficulty adapting to change were recurring topics that many executive coaches linked to leader derailment. This study has shown that they tremendously impact a leader's effectiveness. Consequently, poor polarity management was used to capture these derailing factors. Recollect that polarity management is a concept championed by Johnson (1992; 2020), which refers to the ability to navigate and balance competing values, demands, and perspectives within organizational leadership. It is important to understand that these issues are not simple problems with straightforward solutions, but rather complex, inescapable, and interdependent

pairs that require management rather than resolution. Examples include the need for stability versus change or embracing conservatism versus liberalism.

Derailment in the context of poor polarity management refers to a situation where a leader, often successful up to a point, fails to adapt to complex leadership demands and hence falls short of expected goals or experiences a significant decline in effectiveness. One coach explained the importance of understanding the problem and emphasized why polarity management is critical for leaders: “Versatility and the ability to read a situation and people and adapt accordingly are huge differentiators in terms of leadership success—not a one size fits all when dealing with people, situations, strategies, and especially crises” (Participant 7). In other words, leaders need to avoid over-relying on a particular skill or pole. Instead, they should examine and realize that another approach or skill might be more applicable to the situation, rather than approach leadership with a one-size-fits-all philosophy.

In principle, the executive coaches brought to light that leaders need to understand that the same method of operation is not good enough at all times and may not be appropriate for some situations or circumstances that leaders might face. This study has discovered that effective leadership is the ability to manage polarities through a versatile repertoire of skills, which is indicative of a leader’s maturity, open-mindedness, and growth. Accordingly, failure to comprehend this fact or to be aware of it becomes a derailing factor that tends to affect leaders negatively without them even realizing it. One coach underscored its significance and stated, “You have to give into the idea that there is possibly another way to do things that you’re not even aware of” (Participant 18). This research finding indicates that mastering polarity management is crucial for leaders.

Finding 4: An Organization Can Become a Pitfall for a Leader

Throughout this study, the concept that organizational factors can derail leaders kept emerging across the data. This study underscored that organizational factors play a critical role in leader derailment, where a leader fails to meet their organization's expectations, often resulting in termination, demotion, or plateauing. All executive coaches who participated in this study explicitly stated that organizational factors do derail leaders, and they have witnessed it. This discovery is significant because it suggests that some factors outside the control of a leader can contribute to their derailment. For example, participants explained that sometimes organizational components can trigger certain circumstances that negatively affect leaders and cause them to face tasks and responsibilities that are contrary to their values and beliefs.

The following areas (below) are the specific organizational factors that this research discovered contributed to leader derailment: absence of feedback to leaders, misalignment between leader and organizational culture and structures, office politics and low idiosyncrasy credits, and workplace abuse and bullying. These factors significantly contribute to leader derailment by rendering leaders uninformed, isolated, confused, unsupported, displaced, demotivated, and ultimately ineffective. To elucidate the most pertinent among these factors, this study has found that organizational structures and cultures can have a counterproductive effect on leaders, impeding their success and effectiveness. One participant explained why. She explained:

I often describe organizations on a polar dimension...Some cultures have a cowboy kind of mentality, meaning everybody for themselves, figure out how you want to do it. Go ahead and get it done. Nobody's paying attention. It attracts a particular kind of personality...other cultures have the polar opposite where you feel like you can't move without getting everybody's approval on something...the cowboy culture is going to encourage that overly aggressive behavior. And the kumbaya culture is going to encourage the lack of candidness, the lack of performance management, etc., etc. So, you get extremes on either side. (Participant 3)

The quote above is critical to highlight because it shows that leaders may find themselves in cultures that are more prone to offering them candid feedback and a sense of community and unity. In contrast, some organizations are more aggressive and leave leaders to figure things out themselves to the best of their knowledge and preference. The consequence is that organizational culture is pivotal, influencing not only the operational dynamics within organizations but also the types of personalities they attract and the behaviors they encourage or discourage. The illustrative chasm described above by the executive coach was along a polar dimension, contrasting what might be termed 'cowboy' cultures and their 'kumbaya' counterparts. The 'cowboy' culture is characterized by rugged individualism, where autonomy is prized above consensus. In such environments, leaders are encouraged to pursue objectives with little oversight, embodying a “figure it out on your own” ethos. This culture can attract people who thrive in self-directed settings and feel comfortable making decisions without extensive consultation with others. However, this independence can sometimes devolve into overly aggressive behaviors, as the lack of structured oversight and collaborative checks may encourage a competitive, every-person-for-themselves mentality.

Conversely, the ‘kumbaya’ culture represents the other end of the spectrum, emphasizing consensus and collective approval. Operations within such cultures are markedly different; actions and decisions typically require broad agreement, fostering an environment where leaders may feel restricted by the need for constant approval and validation from peers and superiors. While such a culture nurtures a highly collaborative environment, it may also inadvertently stifle a leader’s initiative and the candidness that a leader may need in the form of feedback loops, potentially leading to inefficiencies and a lack of performance management due to the overemphasis on maintaining harmony and consensus. As a result, if a leader who prefers the

cowboy-type organization finds themselves in the kumbaya culture, they may not be effective in such an environment and could become frustrated and isolated. For example, one coach explained this factor with a real-life story:

I'll give you a great example. I saw a guy who was recruited away from Amazon, with great tech skills. He really understood the digital approach agenda. You know, he's a general manager. And he was brought into another company to duplicate that skill set. While this other company was young, less mature... They weren't a guts, football performance [type] organization. He brought that performance orientation from Amazon and just ran people over. You put that guy in another hard charging-high performance organization, and he would have probably had a much better chance of survival.
(Participant 14)

The polar cultural dimensions underscore the complex interplay between organizational culture and leader performance and behavior. On the one hand, the 'cowboy' culture's (hard charging) emphasis on independence and performance orientation can lead to innovation and rapid decision-making. However, it may foster a competitive, fragmented workplace where people feel used and persistently under pressure. On the other hand, the 'kumbaya' culture's focus on consensus and collective approval can create a cohesive and harmonious work environment. However, it may impede the swift decision-making, accountability, and candid feedback that leaders need. Understanding these cultural factors is crucial for understanding why some leaders derail due to a misfit with their organizational structure and culture and the values it espouses. Therefore, leaders should pay attention and join organizations that reflect and promote their values, working styles, and philosophy to give themselves a better chance for success.

Moreover, it is also prudent for leaders and organizations to support and promote a balanced work environment that fosters individual initiative and collaboration. Striking this balance is critical to cultivating a productive organizational culture that harnesses the strengths of its leaders while mitigating the potential drawbacks inherent in both 'cowboy' and 'kumbaya'

cultures. Overall, this research has revealed that leader derailment is not a simple issue but a complex, multifaceted problem. A range of organizational dynamics, including office politics and low idiosyncrasy credits, a lack of feedback to leaders, workplace abuse and bullying, and, most importantly, the misalignment between leaders, their organizational cultures, and structures can contribute to leader derailment. The findings from this study underscore the concept that organizational factors can derail leaders.

Finding 5: Office Politics is Unavoidable and Beware of Workplace Abuse and Bullies

This research has also discovered that office politics and the inability to understand it can negatively impact leaders, thereby leading to derailment. Office politics is characterized by using power and social networking within an organization to achieve goals that benefit individuals or groups, sometimes at the expense of others (Ferris et al., 2005). Political skills allow individuals—in this case, leaders—to subtly engage in office politics by negotiating and influencing others without overtly stating so. To reiterate the explanation provided by one of the coaches, she explained the nature of politics as follows:

To convince, to negotiate, to influence is what allows you to play the game...it's being able to know the unwritten rules...It's also understanding how things get done. Who are the players?...Politics is not a bad word. That's what I try to communicate to my clients. Politics is not a bad word unless you want to see it as a bad word. Politics is how do people engage to get something done, that's what politics is. (Participant 19)

The statement above underscores the significance of persuasion, negotiation, and influence in navigating the dynamics of organizations. It emphasizes the importance of understanding informal norms and power dynamics (unwritten rules) and identifying key stakeholders (players) in order to effectively accomplish goals. Furthermore, it reframes politics as a neutral tool for achieving objectives rather than a negative concept. Understanding and mastering these skills, as

well as embracing the concept of office politics (ethically), can facilitate successful engagements and achievement within an organizational context.

Therefore, leaders who lack an understanding of office politics may find themselves in a maze-like environment where they are lost because they cannot understand it or decipher how things get done organizationally. Hence, such leaders may be unable to navigate their social systems. Consequently, leaders operating in highly politicized environments may be unable to navigate them and may encounter something akin to a minefield, where missteps can have severe repercussions. As a result, according to Ferris et al. (1996), having political skills is necessary to manage and understand complex social situations and influence others effectively. Without this knowledge, leaders may inadvertently trigger conflicts or fall prey to manipulation, potentially undermining their authority and effectiveness organizationally.

Furthermore, this research has also discovered that engaging in office politics involves strategically deploying idiosyncrasy credits (an approval rating within an organization or team). Note that the concept of idiosyncrasy credits, introduced by Hollander (1958, 1978), refers to the leeway or allowance given to individuals, often leaders, based on their past contributions, performance, and commitment within a group or network. This can be likened to a bank account of goodwill; the more an individual contributes to the group's liking, the larger their balance of idiosyncrasy credits. Furthermore, leaders who do not conform, show commitment, cooperate, and exude brilliance lose their idiosyncrasy credits. This concept crucially reveals, for example, that when a leader with low idiosyncrasy credits proposes innovative changes or attempts to rectify organizational inefficiencies, their colleagues and the organization at large may perceive their actions as untrustworthy, unreliable, unconventional, or divergent. As a result, people may perceive their initiatives as excessively individualistic or a deviation from the established ethos,

which could potentially impede their acceptance and leadership execution. Therefore, if a leader lacks the idiosyncrasy credits required for group buy-in and alliance building, they will not receive the necessary support and approval for executing or implementing an idea. Therefore, in the absence of sufficient idiosyncrasy credits within an organization, a leader's initiatives and actions may encounter resistance or rejection.

Idiosyncrasy credits is a powerful tool for achieving organizational goals and building alliances due to the high approval it gives a leader who has earned it through their brilliance, commitment, and political maneuvering. Therefore, leaders with such high approvals will become more favored and preferred over others. As a result, leaders with low idiosyncrasy credits who cannot understand or engage in reasonable and ethical office politics may suffer because they will lack a support network to rely upon. Consequently, such leaders will have issues navigating their organizational landscape; they will be unable to navigate the political undercurrents and may find themselves displaced and out of favor, possibly leading to stagnancy, demotion, or termination.

Furthermore, in understanding office politics, it is vital to understand the role of organizational networks as a leader and understand how it influences the acquisition of social approval and power within teams and an organization at large. A leader's organizational network can have a significant impact on their acceptance, influence, and authority. Leaders who are isolated or poorly connected in their workplace's social sphere are more vulnerable to being undermined and unsupported due to low idiosyncrasy credits. As a result, their inability to navigate the environment politically, akin to isolated nodes in a network lacking strong connections, puts them at high risk of derailment. Here is a reiteration of a story from one of the executive coaches to emphasize this point. She explained:

I have seen far, far more cases than I would like the judgments of somebody else in the organization...ultimately becoming their derailment. A guy I talked to this week was accused of not supporting women. There is zero evidence that is a consistent pattern, though there was one woman in his organization that he pushed pretty hard because her performance was really bad...she complained, she happened to have friends in lots and lots of places. She rallied all of her friends to convince how horrible he was. And so he got under investigation for that. Obviously, there's no evidence of inappropriate behavior. So he passed the investigation. (Participant 2)

This statement underscores the significance of interpersonal dynamics and perceptions within an organizational context. It highlights how unfounded accusations or misperceptions, even from a single individual, can significantly affect an individual's reputation and career. Despite the lack of evidence supporting the accusations, the leader faced a formal investigation, reflecting the immense impact of social influence and networks within organizations. This statement shows the importance of having a solid network within an organization when one is in trouble. This is because someone else's unwarranted judgment within an organization can increase the derailment risk of a leader when they lack a network of supporters who can vouch for them.

Another finding from this study is that workplace abuse and bullying play a significant role in influencing derailment. This study reveals that workplace abuse by peers or superiors within an organization can cause leader derailment. Workplace abuse includes behaviors such as bullying, harassment, and other forms of interpersonal aggression that act as corrosive forces, undermining trust, respect, and ultimately the disempowerment of the individual (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). According to Einarsen et al. (2007), bullying and harassment can lead to a toxic work environment where fear and control supersede motivation and camaraderie. As a result, the implication is that leaders subjected to abuse will perceive their organization as a toxic, demoralizing, and demotivating place where they experience pain, shame, and disrespect. The result is a loss of confidence and job dissatisfaction (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018), which may

eventually lead to derailment due to demotivation and stress. To uncover and reaffirm one participant's insights about workplace abuse and bullying, here is a quote from one of the coaches:

[When bullied] one is under more stress physiologically, which leads to a degree of defensiveness, and we now have the neurological evidence and hormonal evidence to show that when people are under that degree of chronic stress, they are cognitively, emotionally, and perceptually impaired. So it doesn't even have to be acute stress. You know, the person doesn't have to physically abuse you or shout names at you for you to experience it as stressful...it compromises people's creativity, their performance, their motivation. (Participant 1)

This statement underscores the detrimental impact of workplace bullying on individuals' well-being and performance. It emphasizes that even low-level or chronic stress resulting from bullying can lead to physiological and psychological impairments, including cognitive, emotional, and perceptual problems. These impairments, in turn, compromise creativity, performance, and motivation in the workplace. Surprisingly, people rarely recognize or discuss the concept of a leader being bullied. However, this study found that bullying negatively affects leaders' performance through character assassination. Participants shared a variety of narratives about leaders they knew who experienced bullying in their leadership roles. Here is one example of those stories reiterated:

In the same organization I'm talking about, I think it's fair to say the SVP in charge of field operation was bullied by the folks in mass markets and government contracts by both of those business heads. I would say they did bully him. He would come to meetings with the data showing look, hey, here's deal flow. Here's our resource needs. The math doesn't work. We got to increase our budget to get to this and they would hammer the guy. They would hammer him in a personal way. They wouldn't attack his analysis. They will try to chip away at his credibility and reputation...in the corporate world, here's what bullying looks like: Never any praise or recognition for the good stuff you've done. A steady stream of criticism and negative stuff and then the personal stuff, those ad hominem attacks. It's character assassination. (Participant 14)

As the narrative above has shown, workplace bullying emerges as a stark reality within the intricate web of organizational dynamics, transcending hierarchical boundaries and impacting the fabric of some corporate cultures. The Senior Vice President (SVP) responsible for field operations was ensnared in an adversarial interaction, particularly with other leaders from the mass markets and government contracts division. Despite his attempts to engage in rational arguments, presenting data and analysis to underscore the misalignment between resource allocations and operational demands, his appeals were met not with constructive critique but with relentless personal attacks, undermining his credibility and reputation through ad hominem attacks. This narrative illustrates a broader pattern of behavior within some corporate environments, where bullying is not merely about physical intimidation or overt harassment but often involves subtle, insidious tactics aimed at discrediting individuals and eroding their professional standing. According to this study, leaders are not immune to bullying, and workplace abuse undermines a leader's contributions and corrodes the foundational principles of respect and dignity.

In conclusion, office politics and workplace abuse can derail leaders, affecting their ability to lead effectively, maintain well-being, and achieve organizational goals. Leaders confronting these challenges may experience isolation, leading to a reduction in their influence and reputation. Office politics and workplace abuse are akin to navigating a stormy sea; leaders must be adept at discerning and protecting themselves by steering away to prevent derailment. Developing ethical-political skills, fostering a positive organizational culture, and promoting a zero-tolerance policy towards abuse are crucial strategies that leaders can support to ensure a healthy organizational environment. Leaders who navigate these challenges effectively can achieve their goals and maintain a positive trajectory and influence within their organization.

However, those who fail to detect and manage the intricacies of office politics or find themselves at the receiving end of workplace abuse may be sidelined and derailed, becoming victims of the very dynamics they either naively overlooked or underestimated.

Contributions to Literature

This study has shown that leader derailment, a significant concern for leaders, organizations, and leadership development practitioners, can be influenced by a range of factors broadly categorized into personal, organizational, and situational factors. Each category has unique implications for leadership, and their impact can vary based on the context and specific circumstances surrounding each case. While all can be detrimental, the degree of influence and counterproductivity can differ based on how directly they affect leadership capacity and the broader organizational health. In the following section, their degree of influence is explored.

Derailment Factors Are Not Equivalent

While all three categories (personal, organizational, and situational factors) can lead to leader derailment, personal factors are particularly problematic because they permeate all aspects of leadership—from decision-making and personal conduct to how effectively a leader can manage relationships and organizational challenges. Personal flaws or deficiencies tend to be persistent (unless addressed) and can undermine a leader's effectiveness across a broad range of circumstances. Personal factors that induce derailment include a leader's dysfunctional personality traits, inadequate emotional intelligence, ethical lapses, poor adaptability, and inability to manage polarities. These are often entrenched in a leader's mentality and temperament and can be particularly detrimental because they directly influence how a leader interacts and makes decisions.

Accordingly, this study has brought to light a critical finding: not all leader-derailment factors are created equal. Some are more damaging and ranked higher in terms of consequences. The data from this research revealed that participants have a clear understanding of the precise internal factors that trigger leader derailment. They identified inadequate emotional intelligence as the most significant internal reason for leaders to derail. Furthermore, the data indicated that most participants identified four emotional intelligence incompetencies as the key derailing factors. These were poor self-awareness, emotional dysregulation, a lack of social skills, and low empathy. This study highlighted that these four factors lead to both interpersonal and intrapersonal issues. Among these, most participants ranked low self-awareness as the most significant derailing factor, followed by emotional dysregulation, a lack of social skills, and low empathy. This underscores the profound influence of inadequate emotional intelligence on leader derailment behaviors, thereby emphasizing the critical need to address these issues in leadership development programs and organizational learning.

On the other hand, while potentially problematic and counterproductive, organizational factors can reflect a misfit between a leader and specific environmental facets and conditions of their organization. While these can sometimes be mitigated through changes in either the leader's approach to their organization, by switching organizations, or by adjustments made by the organization to improve its structure or culture, organizational factors can be problematic when left unaddressed. This is why participants in this study emphasized that organizational factors derail leaders, and the data showed that it is the second most influential factor derailing leaders after inadequate emotional intelligence. This is because organizational factors have the power to enable or disable a leader's strength. They can also isolate and confuse leaders, thereby rendering them ineffective in their roles.

Organizational factors encompass an organization's cultural, structural, and political dynamics. The problem arises when the environment is not conducive to the leader's contribution, initiative, style, and value. These organizational derailment factors include leader misalignment with the organization's culture and structures, inadequate support or resources, a toxic or abusive work environment, a lack of feedback to leaders, destructive office politics, and a lack of idiosyncrasy credits. However, this research has discovered that idiosyncrasy credits play a particularly massive role in determining whether a leader succeeds within an organization. This is because the absence of idiosyncrasy credits is detrimental for leaders due to the fact that it undermines their ability to thrive and garner support within their organization. Keep in mind that idiosyncrasy credits are earned through a process of consistent, competent performance and trust-building. Without these credits, leaders lack the necessary support and leeway from their team and organization, making it difficult to lead, implement strategies, or respond effectively to tasks or crises. Thus, it can lead to reduced organizational influence, increased conflict, and ultimately, ineffective leadership. While organizational factors are extrinsic to the individual leader, they can severely limit the leader's effectiveness by creating an environment that is either too constraining, confusing, politically charged, or chaotic. For instance, a highly bureaucratic organization might stifle a leader's innovative capabilities, or a highly politicized environment might encourage manipulative or secretive behaviors, potentially undermining a leader's influence and effectiveness.

Moreover, in contrast to internal and organizational factors, this study posits that situational factors also play a role in leader derailment and are often under the radar. They encompass various external circumstances and pressures that sometimes lie beyond a leader's direct control. Below are some types of situational factors, which are often embedded in

organizational dynamics. Mergers and acquisitions, for example, can result in a complex integration process, requiring careful management of different cultures, systems, and workforces. These dynamics can cause conflicts and confusion problems for leaders and organizations. Next are economic downturns, characterized by shrinking markets and reduced consumer spending. These pose challenges to maintaining financial stability and employee morale. Moreover, economic downturns and reduced consumer spending tend to be blamed on organizational leaders; people see such declines as reflective of a leader's incompetence or inability to inspire consumer spending, even though the leader may not have caused the economic problems or customer drawback. Furthermore, market disruptions, is another derailing situational factor that can be driven by technological advancements or shifting consumer preferences, which necessitate adaptability and innovation. Moreover, when an organization is not ready or receptive to technological advancements or shifting consumer preferences, such situational dynamics will affect the leader negatively. In addition, mandated changes such as regulatory compliance, is another element of situational difficulties that leaders face. They can demand significant resource allocation and organizational restructuring that can unfavorably impact a leader's ability to deliver results.

While situational factors may not directly reflect a leader's capabilities, their impact can be acutely problematic in the short term. A leader who fails to navigate a company through situational demands may encounter rapid declines in organizational credibility, stakeholder trust, and possibly declines in financial revenue and stability. Therefore, it is imperative for organizations to empower their leaders through training and development, enabling them to proactively recognize and respond to situational factors adequately. This proactive approach includes conducting thorough environmental scans to identify potential threats and opportunities,

developing contingency plans for various scenarios, and fostering a culture of adaptability and resilience within the organization. Hence, by effectively creating such ample conditions to manage situational factors, organizations can mitigate its negative impacts and help their leaders avoid derailment.

In summary, while no category of factors is benign, personal factors are often the most problematic because they directly affect a leader's core attributes and behaviors. Next are organizational factors, which this study has shown significantly impact a leader's success or failure since they can be empowering or disempowering. Take, for instance, factors such as a lack of support, destructive office politics, and cultural and structural misalignment between leaders and their organizations; these can take a toll on a leader's performance and mental and emotional well-being, consequently increasing their risk of derailment. Lastly, situational factors, though potentially detrimental and impactful, are more about the interplay between a leader and critical transient events which can implode when mismanaged. Nonetheless, it is crucial for leaders to navigate and overcome situational factors, as failure to do so can be deleterious for them and their organizations.

Interplay of Factors Influencing Leader Derailment: An Integrated Analysis

This study has established that leader derailment can result from a single factor or multiple factors, including inadequate emotional intelligence, a dysfunctional personality, and organizational factors. However, this study posits that these factors can interact in complex ways, amplifying each other's negative impacts and contributing to a leader's downfall. This study suggests that situational factors also contribute to this negative dynamic. This section explores how these factors interact and influence each other, thus compounding their concerning impact. This study urges leaders and organizations to pay attention to these intermingling factors.

Interaction Between a Leader's Inadequate Emotional Intelligence and Situational Factors

During times of crisis, transition, or high stress, a leader's emotional intelligence inadequacies can become particularly evident and detrimental, hindering their ability to navigate challenges effectively. This is because inadequate EI can impair a leader's capacity to manage their own stress responses, compromising their ability to stay composed and make sound decisions under pressure. Additionally, it can hinder their ability to effectively gauge and address the emotions of others, leading to poor communication and decision-making at critical times. The combination of impaired stress management and poor situational awareness can lead to a leader misrepresenting the views and concerns of their team members during high-pressure times, further exacerbating communication challenges that tend to happen during crises or pressure moments. Thus, such communication challenges can lead to confusion, incredibility, and disengagement among team members and colleagues, consequently hampering collaboration and overall performance. Additionally, a leader with low EI may struggle to empathize with the pains and challenges their coworkers and subordinates face, leading to a lack of understanding and support. This can culminate in a disengaged workforce where team members feel lost, undervalued, and abandoned, potentially leading to decreased productivity and higher turnover rates.

To mitigate these challenges, leaders should develop their EI by building self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. By enhancing these competencies, leaders can become more adept at managing their emotions under pressure, maintaining and building strong relationships at critical junctures, and inspiring and motivating themselves and others toward a common goal.

Interaction Between a Leader's Dysfunctional Personality Traits and Situational Factors

In times of adversity or significant transitions, a leader with a subclinically dysfunctional personality may find that their negative traits become amplified, worsening crises rather than their resolution. This is because leaders with dysfunctional personalities often lack the ability to engage in self-reflection and take accountability for their actions. Instead, they tend to blame others, resorting to deceptive behavior to cope and deflect blame. This pattern of behavior can have far-reaching consequences, as it can alienate crucial allies and stakeholders. When others perceive a leader as unwilling to take responsibility for their mistakes or actions, they may become less inclined to offer support or assistance. This can make it exceedingly challenging for the leader to navigate external pressures effectively, as they may find themselves isolated and lacking the necessary resources to address the challenges at hand.

Moreover, the lack of accountability, narcissism, and deception that characterize a subclinical dysfunctional personality can hinder a leader's ability to learn from their mistakes and grow. This can perpetuate dysfunctional patterns as the leader continues to make the same mistakes without ever addressing the underlying issues. As a result, it is critical for leaders and organizations to address these negative traits and promote a culture of accountability and self-reflection in order to foster a healthier and more productive environment. This can include providing their leaders with opportunities for personal growth and development, encouraging open and honest communication, and setting clear expectations regarding accountability and responsibility. By addressing the underlying issues that contribute to subclinical dysfunctional personality traits, leaders can improve their effectiveness and create a more positive and

supportive work environment for themselves and those around them, especially during stressful times.

Interaction Between a Leader's Inadequate Emotional Intelligence and Dysfunctional Personality Traits

The intricate interplay between inadequate emotional intelligence and a subclinically dysfunctional personality can profoundly and detrimentally affect leaders and organizations. When a leader lacks EI, it can exacerbate the negative aspects of a toxic or dysfunctional personality, such as rampant selfishness, manipulation, callousness, and deriving joy from the pain of others. Inadequate EI means that a leader needs more self-awareness and self-regulation to recognize and contain their counterproductive impulses and tendencies. Thus, the inadequacy can make it challenging for them to regulate their emotional responses and behaviors constructively. Therefore, a leader with low EI may fail to understand how others perceive their manipulative or domineering behavior, resulting in increased conflict and reduced team cohesion. Thus, the combination of dysfunctional personality traits can further amplify the adverse effects of inadequate EI. Consider a grandiose, entitled, and uncontrollable leader. Because of this combination, they may prioritize their own needs over those of their team or organization, making leadership difficult.

Furthermore, the combination of inadequate EI and dysfunctional personality traits can create a toxic and unsupportive work environment characterized by high levels of stress, anxiety, and distrust. Employees may feel used, manipulated, devalued, disrespected, and thus unmotivated, leading to low morale, psychological insecurity (trust issues), unproductivity, and subsequently, high turnover rates. The interplay of inadequate EI and dysfunctional personality

traits in leadership dynamics can be significant. This study posits that leaders with these deficits are less likely to be successful in their roles and cause damage to their organizations' performance. However, it is crucial to recognize that these deficits are not insurmountable. With the proper support and development, leaders can improve their EI and learn to manage their dysfunctional personality traits, empowering them to control their leadership and organizational behavior.

Interaction Between a Leader's Dysfunctional Personality Traits and a Leader's Misalignment with their Organization

A toxic personality can dramatically clash with a leader's organizational culture, especially in environments that value collaboration and ethical conduct. Leaders with toxic or dysfunctional traits may try to impose a culture of fear or competitiveness that runs counter to the organization's foundational values of psychological safety and collaborativeness, thereby creating friction and dissonance between them and their organization. Consequently, this can erode their legitimacy and authority, causing the organization to reject and ultimately dismiss them. Thus, when there is already a misalignment between a leader's approach and that of their organizational structure and culture, adding a dysfunctional personality to the equation can further reveal and entrench maladaptive behaviors. And if the organizational culture and structure do not provide adequate feedback and checks and balances, a leader's negative behaviors may go unchecked, breeding a toxic organizational environment that affects not only the reputation of the organization but also the morale of peers and subordinates, who may feel undervalued and disengaged. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations, particularly human

resource departments, to thoroughly evaluate the types of people they hire or promote into leadership roles. They should ensure a value alignment with their hires.

Interaction Between a Leader's Misalignment with their Organization and Situational Factors

A misalignment between leaders and their organizations can leave leaders ill-prepared to deal with unexpected changes and challenges. It is critical to state that the misalignment between leaders and their organizations can have severe implications. For instance, if a leader is not in sync with their organizational structure or lacks support due to a cultural misfit, their ability to mobilize resources and garner support in response to situational pressures and changes, such as a sudden shift in market trends, a major client loss, or a significant regulatory change, will likely be ineffective. In times of such unexpected changes, a leader's alignment with the organization becomes even more critical. If a leader is not well prepared and lacks the support of the organization, their ability to effectively manage and respond to these challenges will likely be compromised. As a result, in times of unexpected changes, crises, or mergers and acquisitions, a leader's alignment with their organization becomes even more critical. A well-prepared leader with the organization's backing can effectively manage and respond to these challenges. However, if a leader lacks the necessary preparation and support, their ability to navigate these complexities will be limited.

Understanding the intricate interactions between these factors is essential for organizations looking to prevent leader derailment. By recognizing the signs of leader misalignment and intervening early, organizations can take proactive steps to provide the necessary resources for leaders to adapt. They can also be better prepared to handle changes and

challenges through training and development. By addressing these factors, organizations can create an environment where leaders feel supported, valued, and equipped to thrive in the face of adversity.

Conclusion of Interacting Factors

This comprehensive analysis underscores the complexity of leader derailment and emphasizes the critical need for a multifaceted approach to prevent it. By understanding the intricate interactions between inadequate emotional intelligence, dysfunctional personality traits, counterproductive organizational dynamics, and unfavorable situational factors, organizations can better support their leaders and foster environments conducive to sustainable leadership success.

These derailing factors can have a profound impact on a leader's performance and career trajectory. However, with the right approach, these factors can be mitigated, leading to a positive impact on leadership. But if leaders are not well-trained and receptive to training and development, these factors can quickly accelerate leader derailment. Thus, the interplay of these factors not only compounds their individual effects but also creates a cycle of adverse outcomes that can be difficult to break unless addressed individually. Failure to do so will most likely cause leadership derailment. Recognizing and addressing these factors individually and collectively is essential for organizations aiming to foster effective leadership and prevent derailment. Negligence to do so will create a cycle of poor leadership perpetuating itself. Consequently, leaders may be forced to resign, be demoted, or be terminated. Therefore, organizations should focus on developing leaders with high EI, sponsoring coaching, hiring the right people, fostering a healthy and supportive work environment, and creating a culture of accountability and continuous learning to prevent leader derailment.

Why Do Some Leaders Derail and Some Avoid Derailment Despite Sharing Similar Flaws

This research discovered an anomaly and discrepancy in the data that despite sharing similar flaws, some leaders derail while others do not. This study contends that it is a complex subject that touches on two leadership and organizational dynamic elements. These elements include brilliance and uniqueness, as well as a strong team and network. These factors could potentially explain why this study suggests that some leaders manage to avoid derailment, even when they fail to address or overcome their derailment risks. As a result, the complexity of this subject presents a challenge that this study is eager to explore.

In several excerpts from this study's interviews, some participants mentioned that they knew leaders with derailing risks and behaviors who did not suffer derailment but enjoyed success. For example, one participant mentioned that:

Let me say this: to be a great senior business leader, you don't have to have high emotional intelligence. You just can't be an asshole...If you look at the meta-analyses on leadership and personality for the big five, all are positive predictors of leadership except agreeableness. It's not related to leadership...Put it this way: Maybe one in five of the 50 best CEOs I know of, maybe one in five of them are really good with people. (Participant 14)

Similarly, another coach espoused the importance of emotional intelligence but gave a contrarian perspective in addition to what he had shared earlier during the interview. He stated that:

Self-awareness is arguably the most important thing; it's like how do we show up...a lot of people don't know how they show up. They don't know themselves well enough to know. And by the way, that's highly successful people...I'm talking about external success...I'll give you one example without breaching confidentiality. I've coached a Titan on Wall Street, Master of the Universe, who didn't have high self-awareness. And he actually said to me, he said, I don't know if I need much more than just getting to know myself. Now, externally, he was ridiculously successful. Right, Wall Street, you know where I'm going. They had made a lot of money. Everyone's like oh my God, he's externally very, very successful, and even he actually thinks in his own version of

success, that he is successful. But he did it without a really strong handle on his self-awareness. Isn't that amazing? (Participant 16)

Based on data from this research, this research posits that other unique elements and qualities may determine and influence whether a leader's flaws lead to derailment despite their apparent negativity or counterproductivity in some circumstances. Below is an exploration of why this disparity occurs.

Brilliance and Uniqueness

According to this research, a leader's personal brilliance and uniqueness—such as superior technical knowledge, charisma, innovative-visionary thinking and a strong team and network—determine and influence whether people overlook their flaws and shortcomings. Some leaders possess a high degree of likeability and intelligence, which makes them more valuable and indispensable to their organizations. As a result, this study highlights three essential qualities that can contribute to a leader's brilliance and uniqueness: superior technical knowledge, charisma, and innovative-visionary thinking.

(a) Superior Technical Knowledge: Leaders who possess a deep understanding of their field and mastery of relevant technical knowledge gain respect and admiration from their followers and organizations. This expertise enables them to provide valuable contributions and inspire confidence in their abilities. As a result, when a leader demonstrates superior technical knowledge, it can overshadow any perceived flaws, as their technical competence becomes the primary focus rather than their flaws. (b) Charisma: charismatic leaders possess an innate ability to captivate and influence others. They have a magnetic presence, strong communication skills, and the ability to connect with people on a personal level via jokes and stories. Charismatic

leaders can create a sense of enthusiasm and loyalty among their followers, making them more willing to overlook their leader's shortcomings and counterproductive behaviors or decisions.

Therefore, their ability to inspire and motivate often outweighs any negative qualities. (c)

Innovative-visionary thinking: This study defines innovative-visionary thinking in a leader as the ability and quality to conceptualize future scenarios and possibilities that break away from the current norms and practices, leading to new ideas and approaches that can transform industries or society. This type of thinking blends innovation—introducing novel ideas or methods—with vision, which involves a clear, strategic sense of what the future could or should be. People often view innovative-visionary leaders as pioneers or trailblazers who navigate unexplored territories to effect significant change. For example, Steve Jobs of Apple Inc. was celebrated for his innovative-visionary leadership that revolutionized several industries, from personal computing and animated movies to music, phones, and tablet computing (Isaacson, 2011). His ability to anticipate and articulate the future needs of technology users, as well as his relentless pursuit of designing aesthetically pleasing, user-friendly products, exemplify innovative-visionary thinking. Another example is Elon Musk of Tesla, Inc., and SpaceX; his ventures into electric cars, space travel, and even underground transportation networks highlight his unique blend of innovation and vision (Vance, 2015). Musk's work with Tesla has popularized electric vehicles, significantly disrupting and impacting the automotive industry, while SpaceX looks to make space travel accessible to colonize Mars.

The combination or synergy of superior technical knowledge, charisma (likeability), and innovative-visionary thinking can create a powerful aura that can make a leader appear larger than life. When these traits are present or coalesce, followers are more likely to focus on the leader's strengths and downplay their flaws. Personal brilliance and uniqueness, therefore,

become a strategic tool that allows leaders to effectively manage their image and maintain their influence despite their apparent weaknesses and derailment risks.

Strong Team and Network

The strength and quality of a leader's network and team can also buffer against the adverse effects of their flaws. Because of their brilliance, leaders may gain the support of others and enjoy strong teams and networks. As a result, they may create a cult-like following, enabling them to experience more outstanding support despite their blatant weaknesses. Consequently, when they face criticism or face the possibility of termination, they can rely on their team or network for support, which they can use to counteract criticisms and job threats. This supportive environment and base can compensate for the individual leader's flaws and prevent them from derailment.

In contrast, leaders who do not have solid networks and teams may be unable to galvanize their teams' goodwill and protective influence. As a result, such leaders will find that their flaws lead to more severe consequences. Thus, without the protective buffer of a strong supportive team or network, a leader's shortcomings are more likely to be exposed and criticized, particularly for leaders who are perceived as unlikeable or have not accumulated significant idiosyncrasy credits—to deviate from norms. Therefore, people are less likely to overlook their leadership flaws and more likely to rebuke and repudiate them. As a result, this lack of support magnifies their weaknesses and increases the risk of derailment.

In summary, understanding these dynamics is crucial for both leaders, organizations, and scholars. Overall, this section has some implications; it indicates that some leaders may overlook developing specific competencies that prevent derailment, such as emotional intelligence or

polarity management. In contrast, they may focus on and prioritize their personal brilliance: superior technical knowledge, charisma, and innovative-visionary thinking. Therefore, are some emotionally intelligent leaders prioritizing the development of their EI competencies due to their lack of superior technical knowledge, charisma, and innovative-visionary skills? Furthermore, do supremely technically gifted leaders with charisma and innovative visionary abilities overlook emotional intelligence or other necessary competencies because of their unique personal brilliance? These are questions that should be considered for discussion and further research.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlights that there are six implications for future research. Therefore, practitioners and scholars should consider them. Here is a breakdown of each implication. (a) future research should look into whether emotionally intelligent leaders prioritize their emotional competencies because they lack superior technical expertise; on the other hand, research should also explore whether superiorly gifted leaders, visionaries, and luminaries overlook the importance of developing emotional intelligence competencies possibly because they believe it is not as necessary as their technical expertise; (b) future research should explore if and how often leaders view office politics as beneficial or detrimental to their success; (c) future research should consider the role of self-compassion and motivation in preventing leader derailment; (d) the shadow self and dark side should be further explored to understand why some leaders refuse to address the subject; (e) future studies should examine why some leaders see polarities as problems and one-dimensional choices instead of competing values; (f) future studies should examine why leaders go to organizations that are not compatible with their values and leadership philosophy. These questions are ripe for further exploration.

First, as research continues to delve deeper into leadership dynamics, scholars and practitioners should consider whether emotionally intelligent leaders prioritize their emotional competencies due to their perceived lack of superior technical expertise and visionary and charismatic prowess. Conversely, it is also worth exploring if technically gifted leaders, visionaries, and innovative leaders deprioritize emotional intelligence due to its perceived low importance since they thrive in other competencies. These crucial questions warrant and ignite the need for further exploration, curiosity, and eagerness to discover more.

Secondly, future research should explore how often leaders view office politics as beneficial or detrimental to their success. Future research should investigate the complexities of how leaders perceive office politics and its impact on their success. Several key areas warrant further investigation: (a) Frequency and Nature of Office Politics: How often do leaders encounter office politics in their workplace? Are there different types of office politics that could cause leaders to derail? Does the frequency and nature of office politics vary across organizational levels to the point of counterproductivity for leaders? (b) Perceptions of Office Politics: How do leaders perceive office politics? Do they view it as a positive or negative force? What factors influence leaders' perceptions of office politics? Does their perception of office politics change over time, with experience, or with changes in the organizational context? (c) Impact on Leader Effectiveness: To what extent does office politics affect leaders' effectiveness? How do leaders' perceptions of office politics influence their ability to navigate political challenges and achieve their goals? (d) Strategies for Navigating Office Politics: What strategies do effective leaders use to navigate office politics? How do leaders balance the need to build relationships and maintain political awareness with the ethical and professional standards of their roles? Do effective leaders have distinct skills or behaviors enabling them to navigate office

politics successfully? (e) Organizational Factors and Culture: How does organizational culture influence the prevalence and nature of office politics, and can organizations create cultures that minimize the harmful effects of office politics while harnessing its potential benefits? (f) Gender and diversity considerations: Do women and minority leaders experience office politics differently and detrimentally than their male and majority counterparts? How do gender and diversity factors intersect with perceptions and experiences of office politics reported as career-limiting? Ideally, this study believes a longitudinal and comparative study can track leaders' experiences with office politics over time, shedding light on how perceptions change or maintain and how many leaders correlate their derailment to office politics.

Thirdly, this study showed how important emotional intelligence (EI) is and what happens when leaders do not have enough EI. Of the five core EI competencies—self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation—it is fascinating that only two participants said motivation was critical to avoiding derailment. This finding prompts fascinating inquiries into the lack of perception of motivation as a crucial factor in preventing leadership derailment, in contrast to the other four competencies. Future research should examine this issue, exploring possible explanations for this contrast by investigating hypotheses on whether motivation is critical to preventing leader derailment. In addition to underscoring motivation, this study also suggests that the role of self-compassion in preventing and helping leaders recover from derailment warrants examination. Self-compassion involves treating oneself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance, even in the face of stress, setbacks, and failures (Breines & Chen, 2012; Chen, 2018; Neff et al., 2007). It stands in contrast to self-criticism and self-judgment (found on the dark side), which can be detrimental to one's well-being and performance. Research has shown that self-compassion can enhance resilience, reduce stress, and promote

positive emotions, which are elements and qualities that are essential for effective leadership. Therefore, future studies should examine how self-compassion can act as a protective factor against leadership derailment and how it can facilitate recovery from derailment experiences. By exploring these two areas, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of other factors contributing to leadership success or derailment. This knowledge can enhance leadership development programs and help organizations select and develop emotionally intelligent, motivated, and self-compassionate leaders.

Fourthly, this study underscores the need to explore the shadow self and dark side further, as it can significantly impact a leader's effectiveness and career trajectory. This study asserts that the shadow self and the dark side are crucial aspects of leadership studies because they can interfere with a leader's effectiveness, as demonstrated by this research's exploration of the dark side's impact on lacking coachability and ethical misconduct. Moreover, further research is necessary to understand why some leaders choose not to confront their shadow selves and dark sides despite knowing that not confronting them could potentially shorten their career trajectory and success. However, executive coaches report that even among leaders who acknowledged the existence of their shadow self and dark side, many were not fully aware of its triggers. Therefore, scholars and practitioners should delve deeper into this subject to develop better strategies and interventions to help leaders recognize and address their dark side and consider employing work-based organizational therapists or psychiatrists who can be part of the solution.

Fifth, future studies should examine why some leaders see polarities as an either/or situation rather than embracing them as competing values as both/and. There are several possible reasons why some leaders need help understanding polarities. One possible explanation is that they need to familiarize themselves with the concept of polarity management. Another reason is

that they may need to become more comfortable balancing and embracing competing values, necessities, and ambiguities. Whatever the reason, this study makes it clear that leaders who see polarities as problems or an either/or choice are at a disadvantage because they are less able to manage paradoxes and competing demands, which can lead to stress, ineffectiveness, and lopsided leadership. Therefore, there are additional points that future studies could explore: the role of culture in shaping leaders' views of polarities; the impact of personality traits on leaders' ability to embrace polarities; the level of effectiveness of different methods for managing polarities; and the long-term effects of leaders and their organizations embracing polarities. By exploring these and other questions, future studies can help to better understand how leaders can be more effective in managing paradoxes and necessary competing demands.

The sixth point for further research is focused on examining if and why leaders consciously go to organizations that are incompatible with and conducive to their values and leadership philosophy. This is a significant area of research because it has the potential to shed light on the factors that influence leaders' career decisions and their subsequent success or failure. Now there are several reasons why a leader might choose to work for an organization that is not a suitable fit for them. For instance, the organization's prestige or financial rewards may attract them, or they may perceive it as the optimal platform for career advancement. However, this research shows that derailment can occur when a leader's values and leadership philosophy do not align with their organization's culture and values. This can be a costly and disruptive event for the organization. Whatever the reason, it is crucial to empirically understand why leaders choose to work for organizations that are unsuitable to them. Future studies should examine the factors influencing leaders' career decisions toward organizations that do not share

their values. Such research can help organizations attract and retain the best leaders and create a culture conducive to their success.

In conclusion, exploring these six areas can provide valuable insights for future research. Such future research could help organizations and leaders understand and avoid derailment, develop more effective strategies for navigating polarities, building ethical and quality relationships, becoming better versions of themselves, and achieving workplace goals despite organizational challenges that may manifest as counterproductive office politics.

General Implications for Practice

The findings from this study offer several practical implications and insights for leaders and organizations. Since this research has revealed that leader derailment is a complex issue influenced by multiple factors, several implications for practice should be considered. Several steps can be taken to prevent or remedy derailment effectively. As a result, this study emphasizes that there are key takeaways and best practices that can assist and inform leaders and organizations, especially in the area of talent acquisition and development. These can be narrowed down to: (a) the leader-derailment process is often gradual; (b) derailment is a preventable process; (c) there is no one-size-fits-all approach to preventing derailment; (d) organizations should be more selective when hiring or promoting leaders; (e) embrace office politics ethically; (f) organizations should foster an empowering and supportive culture and environment; and (g) embrace polarity management or adopt a centripetal leadership approach.

First, the leader-derailment process is often gradual. Leaders do not typically derail overnight. Instead, the process often unfolds gradually, marked by detectable warning signs. These warning signs may include performance problems, relationship issues, ethical lapses,

misfits between the leader and organization, and other recurring problems. Organizations can intervene early and prevent derailment if they detect and understand these warning signs.

Second, derailment is a preventable process. While there is no surefire or foolproof method to prevent derailment, several factors can be identified and addressed early on in a leader's career. These factors include, but are not limited to, personality traits, emotional intelligence competencies, leadership styles, and organizational elements. By understanding these factors and providing targeted coaching and development, mentoring, and training, organizations can help leaders avoid derailment.

Third, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to preventing derailment. The best approach to preventing derailment will vary depending on the individual leader and the organization. However, the organization can employ some plausible and compelling recommendations for prevention strategies. These elements include (a) a comprehensive assessment of the leader's strengths and weaknesses; (b) a tailored development plan that addresses the leader's needs; (c) regular feedback and coaching sessions from a trusted mentor, coach, or therapist if the situation requires it; and (d) leaders should only consider joining organizations that align with their values and provide supportive structures for their growth and development. This is because when leaders are misaligned and unhappy in their roles, they are more likely to be stuck, seek other opportunities, or get fired. Consequently, it can be costly and disruptive for an organization.

Fourth, organizations should be more selective when hiring or promoting leaders. Before appointing individuals to leadership roles, organizations should encourage and mandate that candidates take the Hogan Assessment. The Hogan Assessment is a data-based personality evaluation; it is designed to provide 360-degree feedback reviews with development suggestions (Hogan & Hogan, 1997; 2009). Its effectiveness is based on its ability to illustrate how a leader's

personality influences workplace performance and, ultimately, organizational success or failure (Furnham et al, 2013). Therefore, it gives organizations the data they need to minimize turnover by recognizing potential performance issues before hiring candidates. It allows organizations to clearly see the indisputable role that personality plays in team and interpersonal dynamics. This is because individuals' personalities, rather than their actual qualifications or capabilities, determine the nature and fruitfulness of interpersonal relationships at work (Chamorro-Premuzic & Winsborough, 2015). As a result, organizations that use the Hogan Assessment dig beyond applications and credentials and delve into candidates' performance risks, strengths, values, and weaknesses. That way, they can mitigate performance risks and derailment. Thus, the Hogan Assessment helps organizations to recruit and promote the most qualified candidates by identifying individuals who meet both behavioral and technical requirements and identify those who do not.

Fifth, embrace office politics ethically. One of the most critical implications of this research is that office politics is inevitable and unavoidable. In this study, office politics refers to the informal, often behind-the-scenes maneuvering within an organization to gain advantage, influence, or support. This phenomenon is unavoidable due to several intrinsic factors inherent in organizational life: (a) Human nature: As social beings, humans naturally form alliances, compete for resources, and seek to influence others. In the workplace, these behaviors manifest as office politics, driven by personal ambitions, power dynamics, and the desire for recognition and advancement. (b) Scarcity of resources: Resources such as promotions, raises, desirable projects, and recognition are limited in any organization. As a result, the competition for these scarce resources inevitably leads to political behavior, as individuals will strive to position themselves favorably. (c) Organizational structure: Hierarchies and formal structures can create

power differentials and dependencies. Navigating these complexities may require political savviness or shrewdness, as individuals must influence those who control critical resources and decisions. (d) Diverse interests: Organizations consist of individuals and groups with varying goals, values, and perspectives. Conflicts and alliances form when different interests intersect and collide, thereby giving rise to subtle political behavior as people work to align organizational outcomes with their personal or group agendas.

Despite the negative perceptions of office politics, it is possible to engage in it ethically. Promoting positive outcomes for oneself and organization is both plausible and achievable. Therefore, engaging in office politics to improve one's standing as a leader and protect oneself through it is a wise and strategic move. Here are strategies that this study highlights for navigating office politics ethically: (1) Build genuine relationships: Cultivate authentic connections with colleagues based on mutual respect and trust. This approach can be likened to planting a garden, where nurturing each relationship with care and sincerity yields a fruitful and supportive network. (2) Communicate transparently: Be honest and open in your interactions. Transparent communication is like a clear window, allowing others to see one's intentions and reducing misunderstandings and suspicions. (3) Align personal and organizational goals: Ensure that your actions as a leader align with your personal ambitions and your organization's goals and objectives. (4) Advocate for fairness and practice ethical influencing: Leaders can promote prudence and fairness in decision-making processes. This advocacy is akin to a lighthouse, guiding the organization towards ethical practices and illuminating the path for others to follow. Leaders can use their influence to support positive change and ethical behavior. That way, they will guide and steer the organization in a direction that benefits everyone and upholds integrity.

In summary, ethically engaging in office politics can be analogized to a game of chess. Each move must be thoughtful and strategic, considering the broader implications for subordinates, colleagues, and the organization. Similarly, steering through office politics is like sailing a ship. One must navigate through rough waters (challenges such as conflicts of interest, power struggles, and ethical dilemmas) and calm seas (opportunities such as the chance to demonstrate leadership, build alliances, and influence decisions), as well as always maintaining a steady hand on the wheel (ethical principles) to reach one's desired destination (success). This analogy is not just a comparison but a call to action for leaders to be strategic and thoughtful in their approach to work and office politics.

Sixth, organizations should foster an empowering and supportive culture and environment that values moral principles and behaviors, as well as healthy leadership practices. These practices include promoting and embracing a learning and development culture, emphasizing the importance of ethics, accountability, psychological safety, and emotional intelligence, addressing the shadow and dark side, and ensuring alignment between leaders and their organizations.

Seventh point, this study recommends that leaders embrace polarity management or adopt a balanced leadership approach, referred to as *centripetal leadership* in this study. Centripetal leadership is an approach that integrates various ideas, styles, and values into a cohesive whole. It encourages accurate, holistic assessments, refined leadership techniques, and continuous balancing by managing polarities and avoiding extremes, thereby embodying the principle of the golden mean.

In conclusion, understanding the key takeaways and best practices offered here is the first step for leaders and organizations. It empowers them to take proactive measures to prevent

derailment, a crucial aspect in supporting leaders and creating environments conducive to sustainable leadership success. This understanding highlights the importance of developing and implementing preventive and remedial strategies. This comprehensive approach ensures that leaders are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of their roles and enjoy continuous improvement.

Limitations of the Study

While informative and valuable, this confirmatory and exploratory research on leader derailment had two limitations that should be acknowledged and considered when interpreting the findings: (a) sample size and generalizability; and (b) limited scope. Below, a breakdown of each limitation is underlined and explained.

Sample size and generalizability: This study was conducted with a relatively moderate sample size of 22 participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The study's sample size of 22 participants limits the findings' generalizability to a broader population. A larger sample size would increase the study's statistical power, allowing for more extensive qualitative or statistical analysis. It can improve the reliability and validity of the findings, making them more widely representative of the larger target population. A small sample size may not accurately reflect the characteristics of the population, leading to limited findings. Therefore, a larger sample size can offer more data points to identify significant findings. Overall, a larger sample size would strengthen the findings of this study and make them more generalizable to a broader population of leaders.

Limited scope: This research focused on a limited number of factors that contribute to leader derailment based on the perspective of executive coaches; therefore, it is conceivable that executive coaches may have overlooked other factors that may be instrumental in derailing

leaders. The scope of the study was limited to a specific set of factors that 22 executive coaches identified. This decision was made to ensure that the study was focused and manageable for the duration permitted to gather in-depth insights into leader derailment factors. Therefore, there may be other factors that contribute to leader derailment that were not exposed and explored in this study. Consequently, to address this limitation, future research could further examine and expand the scope of the study to include a broader range of factors that may contribute to leader derailment. This can involve conducting additional research with a more diverse group of participants, including derailed leaders themselves, as well as experts from different fields (since this one had the perspective of executive coaches who were former corporate executives, psychologists, and former chief human resource officers). Additionally, future studies could employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, to better understand the factors that contribute to leader derailment.

Despite these limitations, this confirmatory and exploratory research on leader derailment provides deeply valuable insights into the internal and external factors that contribute to a leader's downfall. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, future researchers and practitioners can design future studies that build upon the existing knowledge provided in this study to further advance the understanding of leader derailment.

Conclusion

This study explored the factors that executive coaches believe contribute to the derailment that leaders suffer. This study's findings did not contradict existing research but rather added to it. The conclusions of this research indicate that leader derailment is not one-dimensional; it is a multifaceted and multilayered problem that needs to be addressed. The findings from this study suggest the following: First, emotional intelligence (EI) not only

facilitates better leadership, but it also plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of a leader. This is because emotional intelligence determines a leader's social skills, the type of relationships they will have, their level of empathy for others, and how they regulate their emotions when stressed or provoked. Therefore, this research has shown that inadequate emotional intelligence in leaders contributes to their derailment because it causes them to be unable to connect with others, build and lead a team, and manage themselves appropriately. Secondly, a leader's undiscovered and unregulated personality can be problematic and result in subclinical personality dysfunction. The subclinical personality dysfunction that this study highlighted is the "dark side" of personality, which is the intermediate or halfway point between normal personality and clinical-level pathology. This is based on the theory that the shadow self, a socially undesirable trait, can evolve into the dark side (counterproductive traits) of one's personality when left unchecked or unaddressed. As a result, it can cause leaders to exhibit negative traits such as rejecting coaching, being spiteful, selfish, manipulative, and displaying unempathetic behaviors that are not in the best interests of their organization. Thirdly, it is imperative for leaders to discern and manage polarities. This finding demonstrates that polarities are not inherently problematic. However, they become problematic when leaders fail to manage them effectively and strike a balance between competing values that are interdependent and equally crucial. This problem is characterized by a lack of strategic acumen, inability to delegate, a failure to embrace or adapt to change, and a lack of versatile leadership skills. Therefore, leaders' inability to manage polarities is a derailer, as consistently choosing one pole over the other can have a counterproductive and lopsided effect that alienates other necessary values, approaches, and needs. The fourth and fifth factors state that an organization can become a pitfall for a leader. The point emphasized is that factors beyond a leader's control, rather than a

deficiency in their competence, could derail them. The outlined factors include workplace abuse and bullying, a lack of feedback to leaders, a mismatch in values between a leader and their organization, organizational politics, and low idiosyncrasy credits. However, this research uncovered an intriguing anomaly in relation to these factors. Despite the various derailing factors identified in this research, executive coaches noted that some leaders continue to avoid derailment, even when they have not addressed their derailment risks and behaviors. This discrepancy led this study to investigate further, thus revealing that a leader's brilliance, such as charisma, superior technical knowledge, innovative thinking, and visionary prowess, can often conceal and masquerade their leadership deficiencies and incompetencies. As a result, this study underscores the complex nature of leader derailment, which is multifaceted, detrimental, and sometimes unpredictable due to the various factors and variables at play. These findings have significant implications; they provide actionable insights and a roadmap for leaders and organizations to use when addressing the issue of derailment.

Finally, this research underscored the critical role of leadership development programs in organizations, particularly in preventing derailment. These programs, which focus on enhancing leaders' emotional intelligence competencies, enable better leadership skills, the development of quality relationships through social skills and empathy, as well as better self-management through self-regulation, motivation, and self-awareness. Additionally, this research has highlighted the importance of leaders embracing other development programs and targeted initiatives to bolster versatile leadership abilities. The study further recommended that leaders seek executive coaching to address their other limitations and mitigate dark side tendencies. Another significant point in this study is that leaders should align with an organizational culture and structure that resonates with their values and leadership philosophy. Implementing these

measures can substantially reduce the risk of leader derailment and enhance a leader's effectiveness. To this end, this study affirms that accepting leadership is a sacred responsibility, one that calls for and necessitates a profound commitment to personal and professional growth. To honor this responsibility, leaders must actively confront and overcome their derailment risks. This journey involves embracing continuous learning and development, which enables leaders to evolve and transform into the most effective and enlightened versions of themselves.

APPENDIX A

Questions Used During the Interviews

1. What are the common indicators or early warning signs of leader derailment you have observed in your coaching experience with early to middle-level managers? And have you observed that these characteristics continue at the executive level?
2. In your coaching experience, do external factors such as organizational culture and structures, contribute to leader derailment? If so, how? (2b): Have you witnessed or heard that leaders suffer workplace bullying or abuse? If so, please elaborate?
3. Based on your experience, does a lower level of emotional intelligence contribute to leader derailment? And if so, what domain or component of emotional intelligence is often found lacking in derailed or derailing leaders?
4. How effective is feedback and 360-degree assessments in helping leaders develop and sustain a healthy sense of self-awareness and professional growth?
5. What percentage of leaders in your coaching experience are aware of their dark side or shadow self? And what effect does an unaddressed dark side or shadow self have on leaders?
6. According to various leadership theorists, there are many leadership styles. For example, according to insights from the Hay Mcber group which Daniel Goleman and others highlight, there are 6 leadership styles: Coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coaching. How important is having versatility in leadership? And what are the dangers of not being versatile?
7. Is there a correlation between leader derailment and lacking coachability?

8. Can you provide examples of successful coaching engagements where you helped a leader overcome their derailment risk and tendencies? How did you go about it?
9. Does having or developing self-compassion help leaders avoid or recover from derailment? If so, how would you say it helps?
10. In your experience, when do leaders tend to over-rely on their strength to the point of it becoming a weakness or limitation?
11. What key interventions and insights from your coaching experiences do you believe can help leaders become better versions of themselves?
12. Is there anything that was not covered that you believe would be of benefit to this research?

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

University of Pennsylvania

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Study:

WHAT DO EXECUTIVE COACHES PERCEIVE TO BE THE MAJOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS DERAILING LEADERS

Protocol Number: 854750

Academic Advisor: Dr Larry Moneta:
Email: lmoneta@gmail.com

Principal Investigator: Olurotimi J.D Akindele
Email: olurotimiakindele@outlook.com

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research study. I appreciate your taking the time to provide us with your thoughts and reactions.

Purpose: This study aims to raise awareness and help leaders and organizations avoid and overcome the problem of leader derailment by identifying and understanding different derailment factors based on insights from executive coaches.

Permission to Record the Interview: We also ask for your consent to audio record this interview. If you allow us to audio record this session, we will have a transcript of your discussion from the recording. Transcripts of the interviews will enable us to analyze the interviews for similarities, differences, and themes comprehensively. When we send the recording for transcription, your name will not be associated with the transcription; to protect your privacy, we will have a code number associated with each recording. The transcripts will also be identified by a code number rather than a name. If you do not want your interview recorded, that is fine. We would still like to interview you, and the researcher will take notes during the interview. Your name will not appear on the interviewer's notes as with the transcript. Please note de-identified data collected during the interview may be used for possible future research.

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